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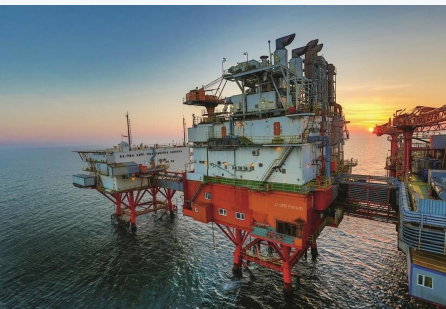
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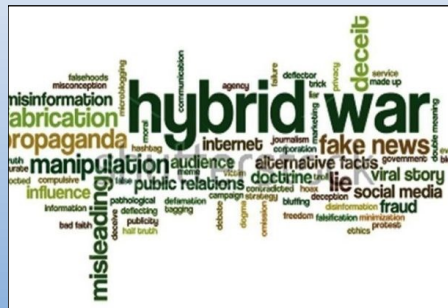
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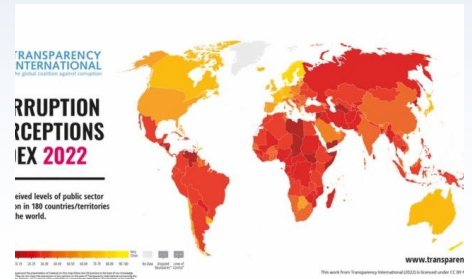
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I. EDITORIAL

EU-Russia Relations - A Significant Deterioration and in an Unexpected Way

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU

"Associate with people who are likely to improve you and welcome those whom you are capable of improving."

Seneca

Both the annexation of Crimea, on February 22, 2014, and the large-scale aggression and invasion of Ukraine on February 22, 2022, seem to have triggered the biggest transformations in Europe in its entirety, generating unpredictable developments in the political, economic and military relations between countries, disrupting energy markets, overturning existing regional and global supply chains and marking a turning point and a serious and, by implication, decisive and irreversible rupture in the European Union's (EU) relations with the Russian Federation. So, the effects of the brutal and unjustified attack on Ukraine continue to prove particularly disturbing around the world, but especially in Eastern Europe, which remembers Russian hostility and occupation. This explains why there has been so much support in the region for severe sanctions against Russia, why countries sent financial, military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, why NATO's eastern flank was strengthened, and why Europe received millions of Ukrainian refugees.



Source: <https://blacknews.ro/ue-are-o-gama-larga-de-raspunsuri-latorice-actiune-a-rusiei-fata-de-ucraina/>

Now the EU is being criticized for its internal divisions and the inability of its member states to address Russia with one voice. Indeed, the EU's difficulties in its political, economic and social sectors where there has often been extensive cooperation, have been attributed to the position taken by some national governments to prioritize their bilateral relations with Russia, without considering the effect of adopting a such position had on the EU. We must emphasize this because Russia has been constantly criticized for its policy of divide and dominate the EU, aiming to deliberately create divisions between the Member States. Critics have argued that the bilateral relations of the EU's Member States with various other states have weakened the EU's policy, as they have undermined the decision-making process and the effectiveness of common policies. It can be said that Russia has often capitalized and continues to capitalize on divisions among the EU Member States by blocking policies unfavorable to them, thus obtaining concessions from some Member States.

In this context, there are many signs that show that in some Eastern European countries citizens still sympathize with Russia, despite the fact that they have faced Moscow's aggression in the past. Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary have recently stood out as particularly pro-Russian. A September 2022 poll showed that most Slovaks would welcome a Russian military victory over Ukraine. In another survey conducted in May 2022, only 33% of Bulgarians and 45% of Hungarians perceived Russia as a threat. According to a Eurobarometer survey conducted in the fall of 2022, Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria showed the weakest support in the region for the EU's sanctions against Russia. These attitudes were reflected in government policies and their rhetoric.

Bulgaria and Hungary are the only NATO and EU Member States that have officially refused to supply arms to Ukraine, echoing the popular belief that doing so would draw these countries into conflict. The previous government of Bulgaria had to secretly supply Kyiv with ammunition and fuel, hiding all information related to this matter from the public. While the Slovak government has provided bold and open aid to Ukraine, including supplies of heavy weaponry, and is among the top international supporters in terms of aid given from its gross domestic product (GDP). However, it took Hungary's side when it came to adopting uncomfortable economic decisions.

More recent polls show a shift in certain European societies on who is to blame for the war in Ukraine. GLOBSEC commissioned a representative sociological survey in eight Central and Eastern European countries and compared its results with a similar survey conducted a year before in the second half of spring 2022. The study included Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Slovakia. Over the year, the number of those who agree that Russia is primarily responsible for the attack on Ukraine has increased or remained almost unchanged in most countries surveyed. Last year, there was only one country where less than half of the citizens believed Russia was not to blame – Hungary (48%). Today, the Hungarian society has changed its mind significantly, with more than half of Hungarians believing that Russia's attack is baseless – 54%. However, in Bulgaria, the belief in Russia's culpability for the attack on Ukraine decreased from 50% to 46%, while in Slovakia this number decreased from 51% to 40%, the lowest among the countries surveyed. The Slovak president has previously expressed concerns regarding the rise of the pro-Russian sentiment in his country, and Slovak intelligence services recently revealed Russia's attempts to tamper with the upcoming early parliamentary elections, scheduled for September 2023.

By carefully analyzing the history of relations between the states, we can point out that the persistent pro-Russian sentiments in these countries have a lot to do with recent history and Russian opportunism. The transition from communism to other types of regimes in Eastern Europe came with high expectations of freedom, democracy and prosperity that were not always met. Pursuing the Western model of development has not only failed in the eyes of some Eastern Europeans, but has also produced feelings of inadequacy and disappointment that have given rise to room for malignant foreign interference, a process favored and supported by the rise of the social networks and unregulated digital environments. Moscow, using its Cold War propaganda, took advantage of these anxieties and irrational nostalgia, exploiting ideas of pan-Slavic unity and similarities between languages, history and culture. Of course, these strategies succeed where weak democratic foundations allowed them. Rising energy prices, the cost of living, poverty and high inflation have also fueled the frustration of the population and the pro-Russian sentiment in some parts of Europe.

Different domestic priorities and power difference between the EU Member States have led to disagreements over the most appropriate course of action with regard to Russia. The big Member States, especially Germany and France (but also the UK, until leaving the EU), have often been the most influential in the relationship with Russia, but they do not share the same history with Russia as other Central, Eastern and North European countries. The states that meant little to Russia received very limited attention on a political level. Russia's three foreign policy doctrines (2000, 2008 and 2013), adopted since President V. Putin came to power, have made it clear that only a small group of EU Member States, notably Germany, France and Italy, are considered to be a priority for the promotion of Russia's national interests in Europe and globally. This is one of the EU's problems in general and needs to be addressed very carefully, because such attitudes perpetuate the East-West rift within the EU and open the door to Russia's "divide and conquer" tactic adopted to divide Europe. As a result, it turns out that there is need for a more nuanced assessment of national foreign policy choices and their effects turns out to be necessary, as it helps to explain why and how the EU-Russia relationship has bottomed out in a way that many decision-makers did not anticipate.

The EU's weak foreign and security policy is, however, only a partial explanation of why the EU's relations with Russia have gone so badly. Another reason is the effectiveness of Russia's strategy - "maskirovka" (the art of deception) that characterizes Russia's diplomatic relations with other countries in the world. The Russian term "маскировка", mentioned earlier, literally means disguise. An early military

meaning was camouflage, later used as cloaking the battlefields using smoke and other methods. It then came to have a broader meaning - military deception, even denial and deception in general.

Therefore, the EU requires, in addition to greater resources and more efficient and effective structures, a much greater knowledge of Russia's intentions and a better understanding of the logic of its action, in order to engage more successfully in the relationship with Moscow. Not only did the Kremlin seek new online channels to reach its target audience, but it also commissioned diplomats and extended its network of commentators in various European countries who push their propaganda through traditional media channels. It is true that the average share of Eastern European citizens with internet access has increased considerably compared to a decade ago, to 93% in 2022, giving malicious actors an excellent opportunity to reach and influence populations. Social media platforms have indeed shaped the ways in which events – such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine – are understood, told and remembered. That is why Moscow stepped up its disinformation campaign after the large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the restrictions imposed by the EU on its propaganda channels, such as RT and Sputnik, have failed to limit the spread of fake news.

In conclusion, we can say that a fundamental challenge that limits the EU's ability to assess and have an excellent proactive attitude regarding Russia's actions and policies is undoubtedly the extent to which national information from the 27 Member States is shared with the EU institutions and disseminated among the Member States, but also undisclosed so as not to compromise the decision-making process. In the same context, it is reasonable to assume that while regular consultations took place within EU working groups and on a higher political level they did not understand Russia's "overall image", thus missing from the decision-making process.

II. EUROPE - THE EXTENDED AREA OF THE BLACK SEA



A New Iron Curtain in the Wider Black Sea Region?

Prof. PhD. Constantin HLIHOR

The geopolitical and geostrategic developments in the Black Sea region during the past years, which had a strong impact on the post-Cold War international order, remind us of other major crises in the history of this area. Some analysts believe that the world is about to enter a new cold war¹. Benjamin Schwarz and Christopher Layne, two of the most distinguished international relations analysts, believe that: “From Murmansk in the Arctic to Varna at the Black Sea, the NATO armed forces and the Russian Federation threaten each other through a new Iron Curtain. Unlike the long dark struggle that characterized the Cold War, the current confrontation is decidedly heated. As former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice and former Defence Secretary, Robert Gates acknowledged, the US is waging a proxy war against Russia”².

Others believe that the events taking place today in this area of extreme geopolitical pressure are similar to those of 1939, when the world was on the brink of that serious world war.³ Some historians and political scientists looking for similarities and differences go as far as the middle of the 19th century, when the Crimean War (1853-1856) took place, believing that today the second Crimean War occurs⁴.



Source: <https://www.casamariinegre.ro/studii/geopolitica/109/extinderea-constructiei-europene-in-zona-extinsa-a-marii-negre-balcaniei-de-vest>

¹Constantin Hlihor, *Spre un nou război rece? Geopolitical codes/Imaginarul geopolitic și relațiile Est-Vest după dispariția Uniunii Sovietice [Towards a New Cold War? Geopolitical Codes/The Geopolitical Imaginary and the Relations between the East and the West after the Disappearance of the Soviet Union]*, in Lilia Zabolotnaia, coord., *Firul viu, ce leagă timpuri/Времен связующая нить/The Thread That Connects Times*, The collection of articles: *Ad honorem Victor Țvircun. – Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2020 pp. 151-171*; Matthew Kroenig, *Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War in Survival*, vol. 57, no 1, 2015, pp. 49–70; Robert Legvold, *Managing the New Cold War: What Moscow and Washington Can Learn From the Last One in Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no 4, 2014, pp. 74–84, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2014-06-16/managing-new-cold-war>; Richard Sakwa, *New Cold War or Twenty Years Crisis? Russia and International Politics in International Affairs*, vol. 84, no 2, 2008, pp. 241–267.

²Benjamin Schwarz, Christopher Layne, *Why Are We in Ukraine?*, in *Harper's Magazine*, June 2023, <https://lautjournal.info/20230531/pourquoi-sommes-nous-en-ukraine>, accessed on the 10th June 2023.

³Sean McMeekin, *The Primrose Path to Catastrophe*, in *The American Mind. A Publication of the Claremont Institute*, 03.17. 2022, <https://americanmind.org/salvo/the-primrose-path-to-catastrophe/> accessed on the 28th May 2023.

⁴Alexander Etkind, *Two Toxic Commodities, Two Crimean Wars, and Other Wrong Historical Analogies*, in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 14.03.2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/89261>

In the time up to the outbreak of the Crimean War, in 1853, Russia annexed Finland, the Baltic countries, part of Poland, Ukraine, west of the Dnieper, Crimea and parts of the Caucasus. This was a cause for concern for great Western powers which made them intervene in the Russian-Turkish war, later known as the Crimean War, in order to restore balance in Europe.⁵

These are just a few of the historical events in this part of the European continent. They show us that the area is not just today the centre of a major conflict, but has always been a geopolitical space of interest for the great powers. On the other hand, we know that historical facts only occur once in time and space, that they cannot be repeated, which would make historical analogies meaningless when understanding the current reality.

The use of such an analysis can be effective, unless political or ideological partisanship understanding pattern occurs. The lack of axiological neutrality in judging a historical fact “can directly lead to catastrophic results”. The historian Michael D. Richards illustrates this point with the US Administration’s handling of the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. President John F. Kennedy did not assess the crisis from the perspective of the ideological struggle that was taking place with great intensity in the public space between the Soviet Union and the USA, but he appealed to the historical analogy. In order to assess the events that took place in Cuba, he had on his desk at least two examples from the history of the 20th century. One of these referred to the “Munich Lessons”, which showed American policymakers that any sign of weakness in relation to an enemy would lead to World War III. The analogy showed that Nikita S. Khrushchev, the Soviet leader responsible for introducing nuclear missiles into Cuba, behaved no differently than Hitler. From this perspective, resolving the situation required decisive US action.

The second example was the beginning of World War I. Kennedy had on his desk the analysis of the causes that lead to the war, analysis made by Barbara Tuchman in her work “The Guns of August”. They showed that the leaders of the great powers believed that the war would be won in a very short time and misperceived the other side’s intention. The result was a war of attrition waged over nearly five years with millions of lives lost and unimaginable material destruction. Historian Michael D. Richards’ conclusion was that the nuclear war did not occur because the US president chose the historical analogy that fit the timing of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The US president believed that the USA were at a time that did not “resemble” “Munich”, but the beginning of the World War I and he made the decision to avoid a nuclear confrontation between the USA and the USSR.

Today the geopolitical and geostrategic situation in the Black Sea region has a dual interpretation. Western analysts and political leaders believe it is driven by Russia’s revisionist actions since 2014, meant to “undermine the rule-based international system and cause separation within Europe once more”,⁸ and by its expansion policy meant to rebuild the Soviet Empire.⁹ From Russia’s point of view, the Black Sea region is seen as a NATO “expansion” territory, formed after looking at the realities of the region. Some countries – Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey – are protected by the West’s umbrella of freedom and security, while the so-called “near abroad” countries – Georgia and Ukraine – should be in Moscow’s orbit”.¹⁰

Presumably, such an opinion was formed following a comparison between today’s developments and those at the end of World War II. At that time Soviet leaders argued that their expansion policy was “adopted because of the need to strengthen the country’s military security and have access to the sea. The Soviet Union was directly interested in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe – Finland, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, as well as in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. Pursuing this security policy, the Soviet government declared its intention to prevent the

⁵Hugh Small, *The legacy of the Crimean War still resonates in Ukraine*, in *History Today*, vol. 64, Issue 4, April 2014, <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/history-matters/sebastopol-besieged>, accessed on the 28th May 2023.

⁶Yuen Foong Khong, *How not to learn from history*, in *International Affairs*, Volume 98, Issue 5, September 2022, Pages 1737–1762, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia192> accessed on the 27th September 2022.

⁷Michael D. Richards, *Historical Analogies: Handle with Care*, in *Origins. Current Events in Historical Perspective*, February, 2001, https://origins.osu.edu/history-news/historical-analogies-handle-care?language_content_entity=en, accessed on the 27th September 2022.

⁸Andrei Soldatov, Irina Borogan, *The New Iron Curtain*, in *CEPA*, August 26, 2019, <https://cepa.org/article/the-new-iron-curtain/> accessed on the 27th September 2022.

⁹Michael Rywkin, *Russia: An Adventure to Restore the Empire*, in *American Foreign Policy Interests*, vol. 37, issue 2, 2015, pp. 95–99; Chaim Shinar, *Vladimir Putin’s Aspiration to Restore the Lost Russian Empire*, in *European Review*, vol. 25, issue 4, 2017, pp. 642–654.

¹⁰Andrei Soldatov, Irina Borogan, *cited works*.

future transformation of the border states into a base of aggression against the Soviet Union".¹¹

Moscow's geopolitical and geostrategic interests have clashed with those of other actors in the area, but also with those of its major allies in the United Nations Coalition. The rivalry born of this conflict of interests made the Black Sea part of the Iron Curtain that divided the international political scene for nearly half a century. The comparison does not help because then a conflagration was at its end and all belligerents were exhausted, while today the world finds itself on the brink of another global conflagration.

The War in Ukraine. From a Regional Conflict to a Global One or to a New Cold War?

The massive support given by the great Western democracies to the Ukrainian government and the tacit help given to Moscow by the great rival power, the USA, have essentially changed the features of the conflict in Ukraine, which began in February 2022. From a conflict that seemed to be a classic conflict – “solving” some territorial issues, it has now turned into a clash of forces with diametrically opposed ideologies and worldviews.¹² Professor Timothy Snyder from Yale University believes that “Russia, an aging tyranny, seeks to destroy Ukraine, a defiant democracy. A Ukrainian victory would confirm the principle of self-rule, allow the integration of Europe to proceed, and empower people of goodwill to return reinvigorated to other global challenges. A Russian victory, by contrast, would extend genocidal policies in Ukraine, subordinate Europeans, and render any vision of a geopolitical European Union obsolete. Should Russia continue its illegal blockade of the Black Sea, it could starve Africans and Asians, who depend on Ukrainian grain, precipitating a durable international crisis that will make it all but impossible to deal with common threats”.¹³ President Joe Biden, in his St. Patrick's Day speech, said: “I think we're in a genuine struggle between autocracies and democracies, and whether or not democracies can be sustained”.¹⁴ These remarks led analyst Christopher Layne to compare the US president's hyperbolic language as “strikingly reminiscent of NSC-68, the document that transformed the post-World War II U.S.-Soviet relationship into a zero-sum, virulent ideological conflict. Mentally, Biden and the American foreign policy establishment, are still mired in a Cold War mindset”.¹⁵

These developments in the Black Sea region did not lead to the emergence of a different geopolitical situation on a global level, but rather accelerated the trends that had appeared since the first decade of the new century.¹⁶ Professor Charles A. Kupchan of Georgetown University: “A new cold war has come to seem all but inevitable. Tensions between China and the United States are mounting in step with Beijing's growing power and ambition. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has poisoned its relations with the West and pushed Moscow and Beijing closer together, pitting a democratic bloc anchored by the United States against an autocratic one anchored by China and Russia. Much as it did in the 20th century, Washington is teaming up with allies in Europe and Asia to contain the ambitions of its rivals.”¹⁷

But even in this case, the method of comparison does not help us, because in the new Cold War the relations between the actors are totally changed as compared to the old Cold War. For most of the classic Cold War era, China and the Soviet Union were at ideological odds, affecting the unity of the communist bloc and implicitly its ability to react. Moscow could not cooperate with Beijing against the West. Today China and Russia are close partners. Russia, now economically and diplomatically isolated from the West, is increasingly

¹¹N. A. Narochitskaya, *Yaltinskaya konferentsiya 1945 goda i sovremennaya geopolitika/ Conferința de la Ialta din 1945 și geopolitica modernă [The Yalta Conference in 1945 and Modern Geopolitics]*, <https://histrf.ru/uploads/media/default/0001/26/c2cf49d086fae08b97150763b92deab4b75d358b.pdf>, accessed on the 26th September 2022.

¹²Constantin Hlihor, *Criza Ucraineană. De la un război local la o confruntare globală pentru securitate, stabilitate și păstrarea/ schimbarea ordinii internaționale [The Ukrainian Crisis. From a Local War to a Global Confrontation for Security, Stability and the Change of the New World Order]*, in Emil Constantinescu, Oana-Elena Brânda, eds., *Lumea Post-Pandemie. Între război și pace. Eșuri, [The World after the Pandemic. Between War and Peace]* vol. II, RAO Publishing, Bucharest, 2022, pp. 337-351.

¹³Timothy Snyder, *Ukraine Holds the Future. The War Between Democracy and Nihilism*, in *Foreign Affairs*, September 6, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/ukraine-war-democracy-nihilism-timothy-snyder>.

¹⁴Remarks by President Biden at the Annual Friends of Ireland Luncheon, *The White House*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/17/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-annual-friends-of-ireland-luncheon/>

¹⁵Christopher Layne, *Can America and NATO Avoid a Broader War Over Ukraine?* in *The National Interest*, March 22, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/can-america-and-nato-avoid-broader-war-over-ukraine-201361?page=0%2C2>

¹⁶Mark MacKinnon, *The New Cold War: Revolutions, Rigged Elections and Pipeline Politics in the Former Soviet Union*, Carroll & Graf, New York, 2007; Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2008.

¹⁷Charles A. Kupchan, *A New Cold War Could Be Much Worse Than the One We Remember*, in *The Atlantic*, June 3, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/06/cold-war-china-risks/674272/>

dependent on China, a dynamic that could give Beijing leverage over the Kremlin in the near future.¹⁸

So, the new Cold War could be even more costly and dangerous.¹⁹ It would be wrong to assume that a new Cold War would play out like the 20th century version, with democracies on one side, autocracies on the other, and the West enjoying the upper hand. During the last round of Eastern-Western rivalry, bipolarity made geopolitical competition predictable and manageable. Stability arose naturally from the balance between the two dominant poles of power; The United States and the Soviet Union forced most of the world's countries to align themselves with one side or the other. The democratic side eventually overcame its autocratic competitor, allowing the West to prevail.²⁰ Today, it is difficult for the two poles of a future cold war to be able to impose an alignment with one or the other pole of power as it happened between 1946-1947. The war in Ukraine shows this: "Some countries, like Israel and Turkey, protect their relations with Moscow. Many others favour China, which has substantially increased its economic and political influence in the global south through its Belt and Road Initiative. About two-thirds of the world's countries now trade more with China than with the United States. In many parts of the developing world, China has become the main lender".²¹ Therefore, the iron curtain will not have the same imaginary route nor the same consistency. In some parts of the world the trail of this curtain will be more prominent in the collective mind of the leaders and public opinion, and in others more diffuse. The conflict in Ukraine made this curtain very "visible" in the extended Black Sea region.

A Separating Line and More Geopolitical Pressure in the Wider Black Sea Region

On a regional level, the stake of this conflict is the control of the wider Black Sea region. Western and Russian analysts describe and explain in their own way the impact and consequences of the conflict for the geopolitics of this area. "The Black Sea has become a stage for Russia's global competition with the West, to demonstrate its desire to regain its status as a great power and arrange a *multipolar world* to share it on an equal footing with the United States in the West and with China in the East."²² Political scientist Vladimir Socor believes that: "Ideally, the cease-fire [in Ukraine] would hold, leading to a status quo like the one that prevails on the Korean Peninsula, which has remained largely stable without a formal peace pact for 70 years. ...Cyprus has similarly been divided but stable for decades.... This [partition] is not an ideal outcome, but it is preferable to a high-intensity war that continues for years."²³ As the reality of the Ukrainian battlefield shows now and as the chessboard of global diplomacy presents itself, none of the mentioned assessments have much chance of materializing in the foreseeable future. But history shows us that in the modern and contemporary evolution of the world, no conflict has been perpetual, although we can find elements comparable to many other conflagrations.²⁴ According to Chinese analysts, "the war turns out to be one of attrition. Russia has failed to make obvious gains, but it can sustain the war given its advantages in manpower, military industry and an economy that is not substantively crippled by the war."²⁵ In a recent study drawn by professor and political analyst Christopher Layne and journalist Benjamin Schwarz, they emphasize that recent world events clearly indicate that "neither Moscow nor Kyiv seem capable of fully achieving their stated war objectives. Despite its proclaimed annexation of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson administrative districts, Moscow is unlikely to establish full control over them. Similarly, Ukraine is unlikely to regain all the territory it lost before 2014 to Moscow".²⁶ The military scenarios in the beginning of the war proved to be totally inadequate as neither side was able to completely collapse the other. With a greater dose of realism were the scenarios related to the international order. Perhaps the most important consequence of the invasion of Ukraine was the fragmentation of the current US-led global order after the end of the Cold War.

¹⁸*Ibidem.*

¹⁹*Ibidem.*

²⁰Constantin Hlihor, *Rivalitate și confruntare geostrategică între Est și Vest în timpul Războiului Rece. Comportamentul geopolitic al României. [Rivalry and Geostrategic Confrontation between the East and the West during the Cold War. Romania's Geopolitical Behaviour]* in *Arhivele Totalitarismului*, Anul XXX, no. 116-117/ 3-4, 2022, pp. 11-44.

²¹Charles A. Kupchan, *cited works.*

²²Evgheii Komarov, *Чёрное море: военный полигон России или регион мира? / Chernoye more: poligon Rossii ili region mira? In Golos Ameriki*, in 15 September, 2022, online <https://www.golosameriki.com/a/experts-of-the-center-for-european-policy-analysis/6748447.html>

²³Vladimir Socor, *Bringing Russia Back From the Cold at Ukraine's Expense, (Part Three)*, in *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 20, no. 90, online <https://jamestown.org/program/bringing-russia-back-from-the-cold-at-ukraines-expense-part-three/>

²⁴Margaret MacMillan, *How Wars Don't End. Ukraine, Russia, and the Lessons of World War I*, in *Foreign Affairs*, June 12, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/how-wars-dont-end>.

²⁵Zhou Bo, *Are We Already in A New Cold War?* in *ESL&NETWORK*, 02.06.2023, <https://www.eslnetwork.com/2023/06/02/are-we-already-in-a-new-cold-war/> accessed on 10th June 2023.

²⁶Benjamin Schwarz, Christopher Layne, *cited works.*

Increased competition and heightened tensions between the still-dominant US and rising China have produced a more fluid and transactional geopolitical environment.²⁷ The order after the Cold War is gone,²⁸ and we are not sure what comes next. History shows us that wars of attrition lead even the most intransigent political leaders to think about the compromise solution where the loss-gain equation has a chance to materialize without either side having the feeling of being a winner/loser. In such a situation, a long-term geopolitical situation would appear in the Black Sea region, perhaps a metaphor of the Iron Curtain.²⁹

An Iron Curtain in which the relations between the parties will not be like those at the beginning of the first Cold War, but those at its end, when some countries in the communist bloc no longer aligned with Moscow's policy. Turkey's current position vis-a-vis the geopolitical developments in this area points to such an Iron Curtain in the New Cold War. It is the result of a balance between the political forces of the various factions in the country, the search for strategic autonomy, Turkey's own diversified and complex identity, and the increasing strategic autonomy in the power play between the US, Russia and the EU. Turkey has taken advantage of the Ukrainian crisis and actively mediates between all parties, especially on food transport, the safety of the Black Sea waterway and other issues, to prove its influence as a major power in the wider Black Sea region.³⁰ As other political analysts have noted, Turkey's balanced diplomacy is based on "the need to protect national interests and its understanding of the complex historical causes of the Russia-Ukraine conflict".³¹ This Curtain should in no way exclude Ukraine from the part controlled by the great Western democracies. The Ukrainian nation needs access to the sea for its export-dependent economy to function. Odessa is the "jugular" of Ukraine. The vast majority of Ukraine's exports pass through its seaports. Odessa is Ukraine's largest seaport with a total annual traffic capacity of 43 million tons (18 million tons of dry cargo and 25 million tons of liquid cargo).³² If all ports were under Russian control, this would significantly undermine Ukraine's economic independence. For the EU and the US, it is now of vital interest to keep Russia's expansion in check and – indirectly – to deter others (such as China) from similar ventures, by demonstrating the negative consequences of such military escalation for the aggressor. Without exports going through these important Black Sea hubs, Ukraine's economy would be strangled and affect the supply and distribution chains that connect the current European and global economies.

Instead of Conclusions

The war in Ukraine has led the international political scene to a critical point, where any misperception of the win/lose chances of the leaders involved in this conflict will lead the world to a major war, with humanity as a loser. These misperceptions can occur as a result of the interference of many objective and subjective factors, when the political assess geopolitical developments. One of these factors is the result of the role that experts in international relations, geopolitics and geostrategy play in providing information to decision-makers in international politics. They must not be part of the informational war that is being waged in the public space today, between the two sides, because they must provide the leaders with studies and expertise that are free from political or ideological partisanship. This way political leaders become aware of common perceptual errors and can avoid them or re-examine their views, when it comes to the decision-making process related to solving crises, such as the Ukrainian one.

Professor Robert Jervis analysed the connection between perception, ideology, interests and the decision that state leaders have to make at a given moment and came to the conclusion that often in judging the facts of international politics "the interpretation of the other side that best suits the available evidence may be wrong". There are, however, ways to increase the likelihood that the decision-maker will apply the full measure of his intelligence to the tasks before him. Too often this is not the case.

²⁷Ian Hill, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Is Spurring a Transition of Global Order*, in *The Interpreter*, 22nd May 2023, online <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/russia-s-invasion-ukraine-spurring-transition-global-order>.

²⁸Eric Ciaramella, *Envisioning a Long-Term Security Arrangement for Ukraine*, in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, JUNE 08, 2023, online <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/08/envisioning-long-term-security-arrangement-for-ukraine-pub-89909>.

²⁹Constantin Hlihor, *Spre un nou război rece? Geopolitical codes/Imaginarul geopolitic și relațiile Est-Vest după dispariția Uniunii Sovietice*, in *Lilia Zabolotnaia*, coord., *Firul viu, ce leagă timpuri/Времен связующая нить/The Thread That Connects Times*, The collection of articles: *Ad honorem Victor Țvircun*. - Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2020 pp. 151-171.

³⁰Maxim Edwards, *Erdogan Is a Key Player in Ukraine - on Both Sides*, in *Foreign Policy*, 22nd May 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/05/22/erdogan-turkey-election-ukraine-russia/>.

³¹Zhongmin Liu, Meng Shu, *The Russia-Ukraine conflict and the changing geopolitical landscape in the Middle East*, in *China International Strategy Review*, (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-023-00134-5>.

³²Ioannis E. Kotoulas, Wolfgang Puztai, *Geopolitics of the War in Ukraine*, in *Foreign Affairs Institute*, Athens, 2022, p. 64.

Decision makers assimilate the evidence with their pre-existing beliefs without being aware of alternative interpretations. Conclusions are reached even without careful thinking”.³³ This may explain the reason why Vladimir Putin has come to the conclusion that he must start a classic war in Ukraine. The misperceptions of the Russian leader were generated by an overestimation of the performance of its own army and an underestimation of the Ukrainian army, and were a strong trigger for the war. The perceived weakness of the Ukrainian military based on its past performance, during the Russian invasion of Crimea, in 2014 has led Russia to believe that the likelihood of military success was certain. Incidentally, in the first days of the war, Putin called on the Ukrainian army to take over political power and make peace with Russia. A serious misperception led Vladimir Putin to believe that the Ukrainian military was capable of such a gesture. This belief may also have been fuelled by the analysis and information received from his expert apparatus. These led to misperceptions by Russian war planners who expected less military and civilian resistance in Ukraine and created a force configuration to quickly establish administrative and political control over conquered populated areas. The result is a war of attrition with tens of thousands dead, wounded and displaced, with material destruction hard to restore for years to come.

For Western leaders, understanding how the Ukrainian tragedy came to be is very helpful for future developments in terms of security and stability, not only in the Black Sea region, but also globally. The help experts provide decision-makers when it comes to assessing the possible consequences of the decision-making process, will not solve all the problems they face, when deciding how to end the war in Ukraine, but it is not a trivial thing either. The political reasoning of the political leaders engaged in the war in Ukraine may prevail and may lead to fruitful negotiations and to a solution different from the ones identified in the classical wars. That is, a war ends when one of the belligerents cannot fight any longer. The two world wars are such an example. Today the nuclear arsenal and sophisticated military technologies possessed by the great powers make it unlikely to judge peace and war in Clausewitz’s terms.

This highly sensitive geopolitical area that is the Black Sea may achieve a security, stability and cooperation arrangement based on a curtain model, but would have a variable geometry that depends on how actors show respect to vital national interests not to the territories they occupy, just as the historian Gheorghe I. Brătianu said eight decades ago. New geopolitical rifts could be avoided in the upcoming years, in different regions of the world, where the rivalry between the great powers manifests itself with increased intensity. As is the case of Taiwan, for example. Different solutions will either block the structural changes of the global politics for a long time, or lead to very abrupt and unexpected changes. In both cases, the global geopolitical risks will multiply exponentially.

³³Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics. With a new preface by the author*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 1976, p. 409.

II. EUROPE - ENERGY SECURITY



Romania – A Member State that Contributes to the Energy Security of the European Union – Challenges, Priorities and Strategies for the Adaptation Process to New European Realities

PhD. Cosmin DUMITRESCU

In the current European political-strategic context, characterized by an unprecedented historical complexity, Romania is a country that already plays a major role in the European Union (EU) energy strategy. It involves establishing and strengthening a management and protection system for the energy security of the countries in democratic Europe.

Following the latest geological discoveries in Romania – on-shore and off-shore, it is currently seen as the EU Member State with the richest energy resources in operation and with a major potential in the near future.

Romania's situation is, however, different from Norway's for example, the country with the largest energy resources in Europe after the Russian Federation. It is also different from the one of the countries in the Western Balkans. However, there are some similarities with the latter, with regard to the interest in the development of the energy infrastructure for the transport of hydrocarbons from the eastern neighbourhood of the EU, to the countries with developed energy industries.

If Norway is the second richest country in Europe, the Romanians do not currently rank among the wealthiest nations on our old continent. Romania is a EU and NATO member, however, the country lost an important part of its economic control over its strategic energy capacities and resources, when it sold to the Austrian operator OMV its shares, which allowed the control of the national oil company PETROM, and when it sold to other economic operators (located in other European countries such as Italy, the Czech Republic, Greece) some of the companies that produced and distributed electricity.

On the other hand, Romania is among the few European countries that found and keeps on finding important oil and gas resources on its sovereign territory. A significant area in this regard is the Romanian continental plateau in the Black Sea, which has already proven its huge potential. Under normal circumstances when it uses all its electricity production capacities, Romania can become an electricity exporter. The production exceeds its domestic needs, and more so, when the construction of reactors 3 and 4 of the Cernavodă nuclear power plant ends, and when our country will implement the first modular micro nuclear power reactors



Source: <https://radiomoldova.md/p/15325/romania-va-deveni-cel-mai-mare-producator-de-gaze-naturale-din-uniunea-europeana-de-astazi-incepe-explorarea-zonei-neptun-deep>

production program in Europe, a program carried out by Romania with the direct support of the United States of America, within the framework of the US-Romanian Strategic Partnership.

With a population of almost twenty million inhabitants, Romania is now proving to be a solid state with an emerging economy in Central and Eastern Europe, characterized by a relative energy autonomy. Confronted with a heroic and effective armed resistance from Ukraine after its attack, the Russian Federation continues to push through hybrid instruments to force Romania out of Europe's energy security power games. The fact that Romania will never willingly accept Russia's economic, political and military strategic options, forces Russia to position itself in the uncomfortable situation of identifying other solutions for expanding its control over strategic energy companies, through certain Russian economic operators such as Gazprom, Lukoil, Rosatom and their derivatives registered in democratic countries. It is even trying to buy shares from strategic European energy companies or increase the number of shares it already has, so it can have the power of decision and exert its control over the elements of strategic infrastructure in the European countries. It pursues economic control by taking advantage of the rules imposed by democratic societies that honour the fair competition on the free capital market.

At the same time, Romania is one of the countries in Eastern Europe that is illustrative for the management of the strategic vulnerabilities that all the Member States in this part of the continent have in the field of energy security. The Romanian energy system is diverse enough to be considered resilient to dangers caused by the manifestation of specific energy security risks that occur due to unforeseen technical situations or external political decisions. Some of these situations are the interruption of the external supply chain of the fuel necessary for the production of energy dedicated to the consumption of the population and the strategic infrastructure. According to the communiqués issued by the Government of Romania, there are enough hydrocarbons and the internal resources to ensure domestic consumption even during the cold season, especially now that the imports of natural gas and oil have been cut.

The energy security challenges that the Romanian system must face are directly related to the necessity to reform and restructure the national energy system, in order to provide the Romanian society with the necessary tools to achieve its goals regarding energy efficiency and sufficiency and protect the environment. In order to do this, one needs to invest enormously in the projects related to the reduction of carbon emissions and conservation of coal mines that have become economically ineffective, at the same time with the professional reconversion of the human resources that activate in the coal-mining field.

Given that the energy prices are directly reflected by the price of finished products manufactured by the Romanian industry, one of the major challenges is related to maintaining the balance of the energy prices for both domestic consumers and companies in Romania. Dramatic fluctuations in the energy prices can lead to the lack of competitiveness on the market of products manufactured in Romania. Thus they are in danger of disappearing from the domestic market, which, ever since Romania's accession to the EU, is no longer protected. Final consumers are the most exposed to the volatility of the energy prices. Compared to the EU consumers in Western Europe, in Romania, most of them have limited incomes. Increased energy prices can be found in the prices of the products manufactured in Romania as well. This leads not only to a low consumption on the domestic market, which leads to a low GDP as a whole, but also implies the loss of competitiveness of the Romanian industry. A consequence of this process may be the need to relocate production capacities to other countries that have more advantages for both foreign and Romanian investors.

Perhaps the most important and most difficult challenge that Romania has to face in terms of energy security is the one related to the target it has in achieving the convergence process at the EU level, by recovering the economic differences that still exist between Romania and the developed states of the Union. Romania is forced to make this recovery under the influence of the global, continental and regional security conditions, a much more difficult recovery than the Member States from the southern part of the continent had to face. Romania is on the eastern edge of the EU, being in close proximity to the Russian Federation, which attacked Ukraine with an illegal and unacceptable war of aggression, causing the entire global and European security paradigm to change. It is also easy to see that, despite the sanctions of the international community and the lessening of the dependence of democratic Europe on the energy resources imported from Russia, it still exerts a significant influence on some states in Europe. The economies of these countries, some of which are EU Member States, are still directly and strategically dependent on hydrocarbons supplied by Russia.

Fuel price volatility is another variable of the global energy market which for Romania, as for all other European countries, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe, represents a continuous challenge: after the uncontrolled increase in the price of crude oil, Romanian companies had to face the shock of the forced collapse of its price, and had to deal with the risk of excessive deflation, a real threat to the macroeconomic balance that Romania managed so hard to achieve, after overcoming a period of severe crisis between 2009

and 2012. Then it had to face another low, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis caused by Russia's illegal military aggression against Ukraine.

The strategic characteristics that the Romanian governments have managed to exert on the development of the Romanian energy field in the last 30 years have made the Romanian energy system currently have a relatively balanced configuration, an aspect that allows greater freedom in the determination and implementation of the instruments of management of potential emergency situations, caused by an intentional or unintentional interruption of energy supply between a given source. Thus, Romania has energy sources ranging from nuclear to coal, natural gas, biomass, wind, solar and hydro. According to the official data provided by the Ministry of Energy on June 3, 2023, with a production capacity exceeding 18931.803 MWh, the Romanian energy system is differentiated in terms of energy sources used in production as follows: 18.1 % coal power plants, 35.1% hydro power plants, 15.1% hydrocarbon power plants, 7.5% nuclear power plants, 16% wind power plants, 7.5% solar from photovoltaic devices and 1% biomass power plants.¹

The fast development of renewable energy sources has made thermal power plants uncompetitive, on the Romanian market as well. This is becoming one of the biggest vulnerabilities of the system. In such situations Europe choose to retrofit power plants, without closing them, for national security reasons and for the need to preserve alternative solutions for the energy support of national industries.

In order to comply with the energy security standards that a country of Romania's size must impose on itself, so it can always respond to potential crises caused by the interruption of energy flows, Romania must enforce the necessary policies that provide solutions suitable to the specific challenges of the new production and transmission system configurations, determined by an increased number of renewable energy producers and their installed capabilities. The challenges Romania has to face are the same as all other European countries in this regard. The most important is related to the implementation of economic and financial policies, to encourage the growth of renewable energy production, policies that must include regulations, which allow the change of the entire energy sector. This ensures long-term stability, the change in the green certificates trading system – which allows the increase of carbon dioxide emissions prices – and the growth of the nuclear energy sector which includes the innovative technology of modular micro reactors, without which the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions cannot be effectively achieved.

The rise of the energy prices caused by the high impact of the ratio between production and energy consumption, together with the diminished competitiveness of industrial products, caused by the increase of production costs, must be counterbalanced by concrete measures that Romania must consider – identifying and implementing state support solutions that comply with EU legislation, raising the level of cooperation through mechanisms specific to a regional energy market, implementing solutions for the growth of the biogas and biomass power plant sector, regulations to increase the level of energy consumption from renewable sources, constantly updating studies to coordinate the measures with the transport capacity with the consumers' demand and their actual purchase possibilities.

As a EU Member State and a NATO ally, with constant sustainable economic development and a democratic society through which the stability and democratic values of the western capitalist society are exported to the eastern neighbourhood of the EU, Romania, due to its geostrategic position, finds itself between strong international interests and the influence they exert on the entire international community, on a political, military and strategic level, and especially in terms of economy and trade. Due to the economic sanctions imposed by the democratic Europe on Russia, after it militarily attacked Ukraine, the economic strength that its energy resources give Russia has diminished and an important part of the economies of the EU Member States are no longer dependent on the energy imports from the Russian Federation. Furthermore, they realised, at all decision-making levels, that Russia does not hesitate to use blackmail in Europe, turning export policies to the EU into a real energy weapon in order to achieve its objectives politically and militarily.

The positive perspective of the development of Romania's energy security strategy is also shaped by the latest geological discoveries in the country and on its Black Sea continental plateau. At the same time, the Romanian national energy system does not yet offer the energy independence that Romania wants and needs so much, to ensure its economic development without external interference. In order to pursue this objective, Romania is obliged to strengthen all its national energy security attributes, by continuing to diversify sources and energy transport routes, by continuing to use internal energy resources based on neutral technology, which allow a greater versatility of the energy system, including through re-engineering and rational use of coal-based and nuclear production capacities. These measures must be seconded by the efficiency of energy costs in the residential, industrial and transport sectors and the integration of the internal energy market into the EU

¹<https://arhiva.anre.ro/ro/energie-electrica/rapoarte/puterea-instalata-in-capacitatiile-de-productie-energie-electrica>

market, through interconnectivity and the effective financial coupling of market mechanisms. Attracting and keeping strategic investors in Romania, developing cooperation mechanisms with the EU and the USA, ensuring a constant and sustainable rate of industrial growth, creating jobs, optimizing the national energy system network and determining the emergence of direct benefits for industrial and domestic consumers are only some of Romania's most important challenges whose positive or negative impact directly depends on the way in which Romania manages to build and implement an effective energy security strategy, for a safer and stronger economic future in the EU framework.

In the context of what has been analysed here, we can argue that Romania plays and will continue to play an important role on the European energy market, in the configuration and consolidation of European energy security, with clearly defined influences on a European level and with strategic effects on a global level. Its actions will carry greater weight in the European strategic landscape. Furthermore, the Romanian economy managed to strengthen its influential position in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as within the EU and on a Euro-Atlantic level.

II. EUROPAE- WESTERN BALKANS



Romania's Agenda in the Western Balkans – Where to? The Romania-Serbia Binomial – Less Legends, More Political Nuances

Assoc. prof. PhD. habil. Miruna BUTNARU TRONCOTĂ

The Western Balkans are part of the strategic circle in the EU and NATO's vicinity. Almost anything that happens in the Western Balkans (the name of the region that includes five of the countries belonging to former Yugoslavia, currently "applying" for EU membership – North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo, and Albania) directly or indirectly reverberates through Romania that is its direct neighbour. After Croatia joined the EU in 2013, the past few years were marked by a so called "expansion weariness" and the countries in the Balkans have made no further significant progress in joining the EU. Instead, they all joined NATO (except for Serbia and Kosovo that still have KFOR troops on their territory, and BiH). During all this time, Romania positioned itself as one of the countries that encourages the Balkans integration process, not its constant procrastination. In addition, this went against the grain with certain Member States that became famous for opposing the EU's expansion in the Balkans, often because of domestic reasons, camouflaged as "technical" arguments, countries such as France, the Netherlands or Denmark, and most recently Bulgaria, replacing Greece when it vetoed in the Council against North Macedonia.

Even if the latest expansion methodology launched by the current Von der Leyen Commission in February 2020 was meant to speed the integration process, it achieved nothing. It made room for more political openness (in opposition to the more "technical" approach of the Juncker Commission) and a generally agreed delay, based on the national interest of some EU members that oppose the European integration of the countries in the Balkans. This politicization cost much and diminished the EU's credibility as a geopolitical actor in the Balkans. After the COVID-19 pandemic had already massively hit the countries in the Balkans, the war in Ukraine brought into the light once more all unsolved issues that had remained active in the Balkans for the past ten years. In this context, it is even more useful to look at Romania's bilateral aspiration in the region, leaving aside its multilateral engagements.



Source: <https://www.contributors.ro/la-taclale-cu-vlasti-balcarii-de-vest/>

Where exactly can we find our country's interests with regard to the Balkans? The official statement of all foreign policy actors that represent Romania at the EU (the president, the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs) reassure us that supporting the European and Euro-Atlantic integration process of the countries in the Western Balkans is one of Romania's foreign policy priorities, along with the Republic of Moldova and the Black Sea Region. Beyond the generic approach of the entire region, this foreign policy priority is mostly visible when it comes to Serbia. Here, there are many elements that show direct political, economic and social support. On the other hand, Romania's presence in the other countries is less visible, indirectly, through its attendance to regional forums such as the Regional Cooperation Council, the South-Eastern European Cooperation Process, the Central-European Initiative or the South-Eastern Cooperation Initiative. As a weakness, we notice that Romania was never included in the Berlin Process, an intergovernmental initiative launched by Germany in 2014 to speed up economic projects and facilitate the European integration of the Western Balkans, where Poland was included. Besides these formats, we add Romania's contribution to the peacekeeping missions or to the Kosovo, North Macedonia, Albania, and BiH rule of law. In BiH's case we must point out that Romania has the largest number of troops that take part in the European military peacekeeping mission – EUFOR-ALTHEA, whose mandate was extended for another year. Besides these concrete visible actions, there is of course our lobby behind the curtains within the European Council, publicly invisible. There are also those development projects (rare and symbolic), financed by the Romanian International Cooperation and Development Agency, coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – that apart from Serbia, after 2018, show no evidence of having provided further financing for direct projects, with the exception of those for the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Hence, the so-called Romanian agenda regarding the Western Balkans often refers to the bilateral relation with Serbia, the largest country in the region that Romania shares not only a geographical proximity, but also a historical, religious and cultural background. Beyond this "century-long friendship" façade, there are a few common sensitive issues between two countries, and in the context of the Ukrainian war, they can become dangerous.

The Geopolitical Binomial Romania Serbia – Legend Versus Reality

When we refer to the Romanian-Serbian relations, there is a reflex cliché that says Serbia and the Black Sea are the best neighbours our country could have. Well, in the light of the geopolitical events from the past year, this saying has rather lost its meaning. The Black Sea has become a war zone. I am of course referring to the way the regional dynamics has been seriously affected by the war led by the Russian Federation against Ukraine that started on the 24th February 2022. It turned the Black Sea region into one of the hottest strategic points of the moment, engaging a large number of NATO forces all over the Eastern flank, including in Romania. In addition, after looking at the 2022 reports, drawn up by Transparency International, Freedom House, and the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, we see that Serbia has an even more authoritarian regime, marred by a high corruption level, slightly going against the West and favouring Russia. Serbia's well known foreign policy of balancing between the Kremlin and its Western partners (the EU rather than NATO) went out of balance because of the war, favouring the Russian Federation slightly more, but hiding it behind diplomatic ambivalence and military neutrality.

At this time Serbia is the only country in the Balkans that has not imposed sanctions on Russia, in contrast with the EU's foreign policy on the matter, even if it criticised Ukraine's territorial sovereignty. Furthermore, the fact that Serbia distanced itself from its Euro-Atlantic partners is an indirect action. Serbian actors supported the destabilising narratives regarding North Kosovo or the Republic of Srpska (in BiH), unstable areas with high security risks, and in the past year adopted a secessionist rhetoric, and aligned with the Kremlin's interests, which wishes to increase the number of hot zones in countries that intend to join the EU, aside from Ukraine.

Well, I would not necessarily imply that these aspects lead to a direct deterioration of the relationship between Romania and Serbia, but they certainly place Belgrade in a larger hostile zone towards its Euro-Atlantic partners more than before, which implicitly affects the relationship with Romania. In this context we should wonder – what is it that in this tensed geopolitical context influences Romania's foreign policy concerning the Western Balkans and Serbia in particular? What does Romania do and what does it not do enough for this strategic region?

The Bilateral Relations – Between Statements and Numbers

The Serbian-Romanian bilateral relations are deeply rooted that have been unchanged in the past years. Romania actively supported and keeps on supporting Serbia's integration in the EU, because of their excellent bilateral relations, but also for regional security reasons, and economic benefits. The guarantee of the Romanian-Serbian friendship was reaffirmed at the highest level, during the latest official visits that took place in first

in 2018, at presidency level, and most recently, in 2022, at prime-minister level. The message was clear: *Romania sees Serbia as a key partner in the region*. During the latest bilateral official visit in November 2022, Prime Minister Nicolae Ciucă reasserted Romania's commitment to supporting Serbia join the EU. This is a continuation of the climax of our foreign policy agenda from the first half of 2019, when Romania had the Presidency of the EU Council, and when one of its priorities was supporting the EU integration of the countries in the Western Balkans. This was reconfirmed at presidency level in 2018, when Aleksandar Vučić visited Romania. On that occasion, President Klaus Iohannis stated that Romania was willing to find a compromise solution for the Kosovo issue, which would allow Serbia to join the EU. This was a diplomatic first for Romania, which announced its interest to become a mediator in one of the most complex conflicts of the region – Kosovo's statehood, a matter on which Romania completely stands in solidarity with Serbia – it does not recognise it. However, this intention was criticised by Kosovo and was not brought up in public any more, remaining an odd attempt of declarative regional engagement.

Aside from the declarations and the rhetorical engagements, more or less inspired, in Serbia's case, Romania can really count on a series of solid data that proves the Balkan country plays an active role in its foreign policy. One of the strongest aspects that the bilateral relation is based on is that Serbia is the largest and most important trading partner for Romania in the Western Balkans. According to Serbian data, in 2020, Romania was Serbia's fourth import partner and eighth export partner. It is interesting to see Serbia's first five export partners:

Germany – 12.6%;

Italy – 10.1%;

BiH – 7.7%;

Romania – 5.8%;

The Russian Federation – 4.9%.

Therefore, we see that Romania is no. 4, but also that in 2020 Serbia exported more to our country than in the Russian Federation – a fact that must not be overlooked, especially in the current geopolitical context. Furthermore, in 2020, the Romanian government issued a “Serbia Business Guidebook” that tells us that in 2019 Romanian exports reached a record high, valued at 882.9 million euros, up with 17.62% than the previous year”. Ever since the bilateral visit in 2018, President Iohannis confirmed this constant focus on investments, when he announced “Serbia is our main economic partner from the Western Balkans and it is a growing economic relation (...). Our trade is valued at 1.3 billion euros, double compared to the previous five years”. Four years after, our former Prime Minister, Nicolae Ciucă highlighted during his meeting with Ana Brnabić that a priority at that time was the railway and river transportation projects, because they are important to the relation between citizens, but are also beneficial to the economy. He confirmed the interest of the two countries in implementing the projects in the connectivity and transportation sectors, and in developing the gas pipeline between Romania and Serbia, as well as inaugurating the freeway between Timișoara-Moravița and the speedway Belgrade-Vatin. Economically speaking, in 2022 the results of the economic relations between the two countries were highly visible. In May, the energy ministers of the two countries met to discuss the construction of a gas pipeline to unite Serbia and Romania.

Hence, Romania committed to build joint gas pipelines that could reduce Serbia's dependence on Russian gas, and that would be connected to Hungary and Bulgaria. This project clearly has a significant geopolitical stake, because it intends to decouple Serbia from the Kremlin, through economic means.

All last year representatives from the two countries' chambers of commerce met constantly because of the desire to increase the economic bilateral cooperation and encourage the two business environments to intensify direct contacts by taking part in economic missions and business forums. as a result, in April 2023, Belgrade planned the Serbian-Romanian Business and Investment Forum. In 2022, the two transportation ministers signed a series of agreements regarding the construction of the Timisoara-Moravița freeway, negotiations that started in 2016. The new road would have 73 km and the customs would be moved 1.5 km away from the current one. The A9 freeway would provide a fast connection between Romania and Serbia, but also to the road network of the Western Balkans and Southern Europe. They definitely are stable and visible projects that Romania can implement in order to advance its foreign policy in the Balkans.

These results were palpable because of a Romanian-Serbian Commercial Diplomacy Chamber that was opened in 2020 in Timișoara. It is a non-government, non-profit, apolitical organization, established with the purpose of conducting relations with government and non-government entities, and developing a business environment and strengthen the relations between Romania and Serbia in the following fields: trade, economy,

tourism, culture, health and education. Another financial incentive resulted, was the Border Cooperation Programme, with funds coming from the EU (the IPA Border Cooperation Programme). It is co-financed by the countries that are part of the programme and is destined for the border cooperation between Serbia and Romania, which includes the districts of Timiș, Caraș-Severin and Mehedinți in România, and Severno-Banatski, Srednje-Banatski, Južno-Banatski, Braničevski and Borski in Serbia. According to Serbian stats, the IPA II Programme (2014-2020) with Romania was the most effective of all Serbian border programmes. IPA III (2021-2027) is in progress, which provides new cooperation opportunities with European funds.

Pro-Russian Neutrality?

Let us sum up the more sensitive geopolitical issues between the two countries. Ever since the Russian Federation brought back the war in Europe by invading Ukraine in February 2022, Serbia was subjected to a difficult geopolitical test, especially concerning its military neutrality and its foreign policy engagements to the European bloc. Ever since 2007, the Serbian Constitution made the country adopt a neutral military position. I have shown in one of my previous analysis the impact this neutrality had in the context of the annexation of Crimea, in 2014, when Serbia held the presidency of the OSCE. This atypical military position is a tradition from former Yugoslavia, from the Cold War, as a founder of the non-alignment movement, when it chose to position itself outside the USA-USSR dichotomy. This can also be seen as a convenient solution to stay away from NATO, towards which Serbia is very hostile and resentful, ever since the bombings in 1999. Beyond this formal neutrality, that stipulates the country cannot be part of military alliances, Serbia had no problem arming itself with the help of the Russian Federation, and host one of its “peacekeeping” centres in Nis, or befriend and get close to the country, claiming their Slavic roots.

Several surveys show that Serbian citizens remain pro-Russian, and their belief that Serbia will join the EU is at its lowest in the past years. A recent analysis issued by Global Focus shows disinformation messages that claim the war in Ukraine is rather a war between NATO and Russia, caused by the so-called aggressive policy of the transatlantic allies, a theory that has caught up with Serbians, because of the already existing resentments towards NATO, following the 1999 war. Despite the fact that the quality of the democratic process is worsening and Serbia became one of the “partially free” countries in the *Nations in Transit* annual index, during the April 2022 presidential elections, A. Vučić was elected for a new mandate. Even though the country has European aspirations, the country is seen as Russia and China’s closest ally in the Western Balkans.

There were various signs regarding Serbia’s pro-Russian attitude even in the context of the war in Ukraine. In August 2022, Alexander Vulin, a former Serbian minister for interior travelled to Moscow and met with Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister. Furthermore, he was decorated by the Russian minister for defence. More than this, in September 2022, the Serbian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nikola Selaković signed with S. Lavrov a document for the cooperation between the two countries at the UN General Assembly in New York, making the moment public, almost ostentatious. The action was seen as a confirmation for Russia’s support, but also as an endeavour against the West and against solidarity with Ukraine. Certain European politicians kept on suggesting the EU should “freeze” the negotiations with Serbia. This radical position became even more present in Europe, people asking for Serbia’s “isolation” in the European integration process. It was conceived as an appeal so Serbia can adopt a firm pro-European stand and distance itself from Russia. In March 2022, after the start of the war in Ukraine, a group of European MPs asked the Commission and Josep Borrell to freeze the negotiating process with Serbia, as it did not align with the EU regarding the sanctions against Russia. In May, they were joined by the German Bundestag that suggested the EU should stop sending European funds to countries that refuse to impose sanctions on Russia – and it only refers to Serbia. In this context, Serbia continues to represent a fertile ground for Russia’s malign interference and the Kremlin’s disinformation strategies have a better chance to be effective, especially when the relationship between the West and Russia is becoming more and more hostile. Can Romania remain indifferent with regard to its support in light of these realities? For over a decade, ever since A. Vučić came to power in 2012, Serbia’s relations with Russia grew stronger. Of course, it is easy to explain this closeness as less of an option, but more of a constraint, because Serbia needs Russia’s support in the UN Security Council with Kosovo’s recognition. It is clear that so long as A. Vučić runs Serbia, it will remain engaged in an inconstant policy, while balancing between the EU, Russia and China. The EU pressure is growing, as chapter 31 from the accession process explicitly stipulates that candidate countries should align their foreign policies with that of the EU, which, at present, Serbia is not. This pretend Serbian “pro-Russian neutrality” is a danger for the good relations between Romania and Serbia and there is the risk of a geopolitical distancing, as by the end of this year the EU and NATO will have a firmer attitude towards Russia, which can affect the bilateral relation between Romania and Serbia.

Kosovo's Independence – An Advantage, or Achilles' Heel in the Relation between Romania and Serbia?

Another strong connection between Romania and Serbia was given by the fact that Romania did not recognise Kosovo's independence, a position maintained from 2008 until now. After the proclamation of independence, Romania firmly made its stance known, consistently following this policy for years, a fact appreciated by Serbia. In November 2022, during an interview with a private television, the Serbian ambassador to Romania stated loud and clear that “the most important thing to our relations is the fact that Romania, is in a position where it upholds the rule of international law, and does not recognise the self-proclaimed independence of the so-called Kosovo, and these are the main pillars of our cooperation, and I hope they will remain so in the future.” This is why I wish to highlight that the Kosovo issue can cause problems in the relation between Romania and Serbia.

Why can the Kosovo file create tensions in the relation between Romania and Serbia? Because Romania needs to have a strategy ready regarding Kosovo's possible recognition, should Serbia sign an agreement by the end of this year. The big problem for Romania's foreign policy agenda is how to balance the legal and geopolitical dimensions, because Kosovo's recognition, even if it is *sui generis*, is very difficult to accomplish, without endangering the situation in the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria, especially when Chişinău is in crisis in the context of the war in Ukraine.

At the same time, however, Western partners are constantly reminding Romania that Serbia's future European integration depends on dialoguing on a high level with the authorities in Pristina that should lead to a global agreement for the normalisation between the two. In March 2023, after almost a decade of dialogue mediated by the EU, under the Brussels Agreement (2013), during which less progress was made, the Kosovo Prime Minister, Albin Kurti, and the Serbian President, A. Vučić reached an informal agreement, but they did not sign the addendum that included the steps to implement it. At the end of last year, there was a real diplomatic representation of the French-German binomial, both in Belgrade, and in Pristina so that in 2023, the two sides could sign an agreement, and reach a compromise that both governments agree with. The motive for this concern of the international community is double: on one hand the concern regarding the ambivalence of Serbian policy – its open communication with Russia, and the interest to the European integration, and on the other, the threats of the rising ethnic tensions between the Kosovo Serbs and the Kosovo Albanians. Kosovo's status must be dealt with this year, and Romania's position is not aligned with the preferences of the regional leadership.

After in December 2022 BiH received its status as a candidate to the EU, Kosovo is now the only entity in the Western Balkans that has not yet received this status because it is not recognised as an independent country by five of the 27 EU Member States, Romania being one of them. Furthermore, just after the European Council's decision was announced with regard to BiH, Kosovo officially asked to join the EU, which forces all countries that do not recognise Kosovo (including Romania) to take a stand in the future Council meeting, when this aspect will be discussed.

BiH's endeavour was not symbolic, but had a high security significance, as it came after the EU decided in June 2022 to allow Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to join the EU. As the war in Ukraine continues, in 2022 there were a series of security threats in BiH and Kosovo, in the countries where the majority of the population is Serbian, which were encouraged by Serbia, and determined NATO to consider the Western Balkans and the Black Sea as areas of strategic security interest (the Summit in Madrid). Kosovo is the theatre of destabilising operations supported by the Kremlin's agenda. Both during the summer and winter of 2022, there were a series of events (disturbances regarding the issue of license plates) that became security risks and required the intervention of NATO's KFOR at the border between Serbia and Kosovo (North Mitrovica). Even if at first glance it can resemble a “storm in a teacup”, the gunfire, the threats and the mobilisation of the Serbian troops at the border confirmed the risk of the deterioration of these events, especially when the two parties do not trust each other and maintain tense relations. The source of instability is Serbia's involvement in North Kosovo, where almost a third of the 120.000 Kosovo Serbians live. It reached a high degree when Pristina announced its intention to organize, in December 2022, municipal elections in the municipalities where there lives a Serbian majority, following the boycott and resignation of all Serbian officials and police forces in the area.

The Kosovo authorities postponed the elections for the 23rd April 2023, a point that was followed by a new wave of ethnic tensions that deteriorated and resulted in casualties amongst the ranks of the KFOR troops. In this respect, strategically speaking, Romania's agenda as a NATO member risks to take it further away from Serbia, as it is pressured to recognise Kosovo, following a possible agreement between the two entities.

Another Bone of Contention – The Romanian Community in Serbia

The status of the Romanians in Timoc has always been a sensitive issue in the relationship between Romania and Serbia because they do not benefit from the rights and liberties that Serbia grants the citizens in Vojvodina. The way they are treated, especially when it comes using Romanian in schools, in the relationship with the administration, the religious autonomy between the two regions still linger. The Romanian national minorities in Serbia are artificially divided in Romanians (in Banat, meaning Vojvodina) and Vlachs, south of the Danube. The problem is closely related to the Vlachs' identity who see themselves as Serbians, but Romania sees them as a Romanian minority, while Serbia sees them as two separate communities. The Vlachs' identity is promoted by Serbia south of the Danube, only to make the difference and separate them from the Romanian identity. In numbers, the Romanian community in Serbia is located in two areas – Vojvodina Autonomous Province and in NE Serbia, in the region commonly known as the Valley of Timoc. The results of the that the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has conducted, show that 29,332 people see themselves as Romanians (0.41% of the population as compared to 34,576/0.46%, in 2002), and 35,330 people see themselves as Vlachs, or 0.49% of the population. According to Romanian territorial organizations, the results of the 2011 census do not reflect the reality, as unofficial estimates say that there are many more Romanian ethnics. In 2022 Serbia conducted a new census of its population, and it is expected to provide different results, even if they have not yet been made public. I believe that the data of the latest Serbian census becoming public might generate new diplomatic tensions between Romania and Serbia, which it has already done in 2022, when it was conducted.

This situation led in time to the separation of the Romanian minority in Serbia and to maintaining a constant state of tension between the two diplomacies, which has also affected Serbia's European integration process. In this respect, between 2011 and 2012 the tensions between Romania and Serbia regarding the issue of the Vlachs in the Valley of Timoc reached their high. In February 2012, Romania refused (during the first stage of the negotiations) to green light Belgrade to join the EU, requesting guarantees for the fair treatment of the Vlach minority in Serbia. One of Romania's requests ever since 2011 was dealing with the issue of the Romanian minority in Serbia, which included ensuring proper study conditions in the native language, information facilities for the Romanian minority, the right to guarantee the preservation of their culture, right to self-determination and religion. Romania had been trying for years to open a Romanian consulate in Eastern Serbia to be closer to the large number of the population of Romanian origin that lives in the area, but Serbia opposed the project. Only following the diplomatic incident in 2012 and Romania threatening Serbia that it would use its veto against the latter did it manage to open a consulate in Eastern Serbia, in Zajecar. It has been ten years since then and the status of the Romanian community has not improved. According to a local leader from the Valley of Timoc, a new census of the Serbian population caused tensions, exerting a lot of pressure on the citizen in the region, making them deny their Romanian origins, and this episode was taken advantage of by the nationalist and populist forces from both countries. A danger to the relations between the two countries is the active involvement of the representatives of the Romanian nationalist party, AUR – they take advantage of the state of disappointment and emotions of the Romanians there in the Valley of Timoc, which can lead to an artificial hostility that could become geopolitical and spread mistrust. The Romanian community in Ukraine, for example has been recently used as an instrument of hybrid warfare to engage credible Romanian thought leaders and state institutions in a "dispute" whose sole purpose was to raise suspicions between Romania and Ukraine. The same way was exploited during the 2022 census, the unsolved issue of the Romanians in Serbia.

Conclusions – Less Rhetoric, More Regional Impact

As I have already mentioned, one of the important strategic transformations in 2022, in the context of the war in Ukraine was that the Western Balkans became part of the EU and NATO's strategic agenda considered as important as the Black Sea region. We see this both in the EU's Strategic Compass (March 2022), and more evident in NATO's Strategic Concept (July 2022). Both strategic documents highlight the need to strengthen the security and resilience, including in the field of cyber security, and when countering hybrid threats, managing migration, countering terrorism and promoting regional cooperation and this should equally include the countries in the Western Balkans, as well as those in the Black Sea region.

Unlike other EU and NATO Member States, Romania's security mostly depends on a firm and irreversible integration of the Western Balkans in the European organisation. The fact that the Black Sea and the Western Balkans are seen as areas of strategic interest, should be perceived as a major win for Bucharest, as

there have been many lobby attempts in this sense and all without success.

After Romania and other countries in the region have constantly drawn attention on the Black Sea threats, only after the NATO Summit in Madrid did the organisation recognise the Eastern flank as an essential region for the Alliance. Most recently, on the 6th December 2022, during the EU and the Western Balkans Summit in Tirana/Albania, President Iohannis reiterated Romania's strong support for the region's European perspective. He also expressed support for the European integration of BiH (confirmed by the Council in December 2022) and for the development of a definite action plan that, the Commission drew up to counter the illegal migration through the Western Balkans.

I have shown that Romania's rhetoric regarding its support for the European integration of the Western Balkans is relatively decent. However, when it comes to concrete foreign policy and strategic actions on medium and long terms, it needs more. In this context, Romania needs to recalibrate resolutely its foreign policy to the current regional evolutions in the Western Balkans and mostly its relationship with Serbia.

II. EUROPE- THE WAR IN UKRAINE



The War in Ukraine – An Important Factor for Irreversible Changes in the New World Order

PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU

*“In life power is subject to many earthquakes.
Watch out for cracks!”*

Seneca

The Conflict in Ukraine Points out to a Divided World

The beginning of the war in Ukraine confirmed the of the periodicity of armed conflicts in Europe, conflicts that also mark the formation of a political constellation in the world, a constellation made of three different groups of nations: those that stood by Russia, those that promised and supported Ukraine and a group of non-aligned states that oppose any involvement and/or do not clearly define their positions.

A week after the invasion, the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia's aggression was passed by an overwhelming majority. However, there were 35 abstentions, including three Commonwealth states - South Africa, Pakistan and India. In Asia, only a few governments strongly supported Ukraine - Singapore, South Korea and Japan. The region's biggest rising powers - China, India and Indonesia - refused to take part. The majority of abstentions at the UN (51%) regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine came from African countries. These actions displayed where many African nations stood, similar to how they manifested during the Cold War. Indeed, European countries have responded with significant increases in defense budgets, aligning their security and defense policies with the foreign policies. Although the Central, Eastern and Baltic countries have taken firmer stances regarding Russia than countries such as Germany and France, they have not stopped the EU's overall response. In fact, the illegal invasion of Ukraine accelerated actions and certain stands were adopted that had been “unfathomable” before the war.



Source: <https://posmodernia.com/introduccion-a-la-geopolitica/>

Indeed, European countries have responded with significant increases in defense budgets, aligning their security and defense policies with the foreign policies. Although the Central, Eastern and Baltic countries have taken firmer stances regarding Russia than countries such as Germany and France, they have not stopped the EU's overall response. In fact, the illegal invasion of Ukraine accelerated actions and certain stands were adopted that had been “unfathomable” before the war.

Vladimir Putin, Russia's Most Certain Leader Following 2024?

If we do a thorough and detailed analysis, we can say that, 16 months after the invasion of Ukraine, the contrast between the size and effects of the shocks Russia faces, and the inertia inside the country is striking. Despite military setbacks and the effects of international sanctions, most Russians carried on with their lives as if nothing had happened, while elite politicians, military leaders, some businessmen and various other persona-

lities proved they tried not to think about what tomorrow brought, and put all their trust in Vladimir Putin.

Most likely, some believe that with the emergence of sanctions, problems and serious threats generated by the evolution of the illegal invasion launched by Russia in Ukraine, made V. Putin realise even better that there is no turning back and that his situation may become critical if he does not remain in power as Russia's president after 2024. V. Putin is currently at his second consecutive six-year term.

However, under such circumstances, we must mention that in April 2021, the Russian President V. Putin signed a controversial bill that allows him to stay in power until 2036. The bill, which was also approved by the lower and upper houses of the Moscow Parliament, aligns electoral laws with constitutional amendments approved by the electorate. One of the constitutional amendments allows V. Putin to run for president again after his current term expires in 2024 and again in 2030 if he wants. Under previous electoral laws, a president was allowed to run for two consecutive six-year terms. The Russian leader and a former prime minister, who had been leading the country since 1999 initiated the constitutional changes in January 2020.

According to Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC), for the ratification of the constitutional reforms proposed by the Russian president, V. Putin, there was a 68% turnout, with 78% of those who took part voting in favor of the changes.

However, we must emphasize that the national vote for the mentioned amendments sparked protests in Moscow at that time. According to the results of a survey conducted by the independent Levada Center, paradoxically, 41% of Russians believed V. Putin should remain in power after the expiration of his current mandate in 2024.

As a result, V. Putin will have to decide whether to run for the 2024 and 2030 elections, and we must mention here that he could name a successor. However, in order to have enough time for the election campaign, he would have to do so by the end of December 2023. As we well know, so far, no one knows what his plans are. This, however, is confirmed as very likely, as V. Putin prefers to keep his elites under control. An argument can be made here that in the summer of 2020 he justified the constitutional changes that made it possible to extend his mandates as a precaution against unrest and distrust among the elites, which he said "must work, not look around for successors". Given his disdain for "political defectors - those who have left their "posts" in hard times - it is highly unlikely that he should be one of them.

Some unexpected and surprising events have also taken place in Russia, which will certainly have medium and long-term effects. On June 23, Yevgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin announced a march against the Russian military leadership "to restore justice" after he claimed that a missile attack on his mercenary camp inside Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory had caused substantial casualties. The leader of the Wagner Group, Yevgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin, set in motion a so-called rebellion against the main Russian military leaders, with his forces seizing control of the city of Rostov-on-Don and attempting to move their military apparatus towards Moscow. However, after an agreement negotiated by the President of Belarus, Alexander Grigoryevich Lukashenko, the Kremlin displayed a duplicitous position. Various information were disseminated in the media, according to which, at a first, the accusations against the mercenary leader who revolted had been dropped. Eventually Prigozhin agreed on withdrawing his fighters and moving to Belarus. This information was also announced by the Kremlin through its spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who, on June 24, said that the case against Prigozhin had been dropped and he would move to Belarus. However, V. Putin showed firmness in his speech on the evening of June 26, when he delivered a message saying that those who sign contracts with the defense ministry in Moscow will be considered loyal to Russia.

How did Prigozhin's rebellion get this far? If and how will its consequences affect Putin's power and the war in Ukraine? We ask these questions because the Wagner Group's one-day military action, which ended on June 24, resulted in helicopters going down, as well as one aircraft belonging to the Russian armed forces (an attack helicopter Ka-52, one Mi-8 transport helicopter, three Mi-8 electronic warfare helicopters, one Mi-35 attack helicopter and one Il-18 aircraft). I asked the previous questions because it is more important than ever to identify the causes and objectives of the previously described military actions, which could be based on a scenario that would include a possible surprise attack that could be launched by the Wagner Group in Belarus and which could target Kyiv, all of which could be put in place for Putin's future in the Kremlin.

Russia Wanted, Wants and Will Want to Dominate Entire Europe

It has become abundantly clear that Russian political life will remain heavily influenced by the gloomy and oppressive atmosphere of the war in Ukraine, causing Russian elites to become even more anxious and fearful in forecasting the future.

The widening gap between the Russian elites that favor the escalation of the war in Ukraine and the other side that warns against it has deepened after Russia's withdrawal from the Harkov region and the

relinquishment of the key city of Herson. It was fueled by the tensions and protests generated by the annexation of the occupied Ukrainian regions and the subsequent ambiguity regarding what Russia has on its borders.

Many international analysts predict that in 2023 Russia's already historic war with Ukraine will show its full transformative potential, ultimately changing Russia from within and limiting the ability of its leaders to keep the situation under control and plan the implementation of the decisions they want to adopt.

On an international level, there is a recurrent question: what exactly and why could the evolution of the conflict in Ukraine be misunderstood or underestimated?

First, the Kremlin clearly underestimates Ukraine's determination, because Ukrainians now see this war as existential, especially since they saw and understood after Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol and many other cities, what the Russian occupation means. Life has become extremely difficult for Ukrainians in various war-torn areas. Even if there are major deficiencies in the energy, water and food supply chains, last and constant air raid warnings, we cannot but see the clear message the Ukrainians send: "This is our land and we will fight for it".

In this context, it became obvious that, in the future, the leadership in Kyiv aims for liberation and accession to NATO as quickly as possible, given Russia's aggression over the past nine years. However, Ukraine's NATO membership does not have a broad support within the Alliance not all NATO allies agree with its accession, meaning that it cannot yet enjoy a consensus. At the moment there many allies that do not seem, or are ready to commit to going to war against Russia on Ukraine's behalf, and this is well perceived in Moscow. Secondly, the Kremlin is trying its best, but it is getting harder and harder to influence the peoples of America, Europe, the East or even Africa, trying to convince them that the origins of the conflict in Ukraine actually lie in NATO's expansion. This is in contradiction with a comment V. Putin made in the media, in June 2022, regarding the accession of countries to the North Atlantic Alliance. According to that, "there is nothing Russia should worry about when it comes to Sweden and Finland joining NATO".

Europe has now come together almost entirely in support of Ukraine, with Finland and Sweden abandoning decades of neutrality to try and join NATO, and Berlin discarding five decades of German policy towards the Soviet Union and Russia. It is very likely that the war in Ukraine could Russia militarily, economically and geopolitically crippled. As the two countries are major energy, food and fertilizers suppliers, Russia's conflict with Ukraine has caused disruptions in the supply chains affecting both developing and developed countries. The most important change has been Europe's shift from the dependence of Russian gas to increasing its energy independence. "Europe will never return to meaningful dependency on Russian fossil fuels" said Antony Froggatt, deputy director of the Chatham House Environment and Society Programme. "Even if the war finished tomorrow, trust has been broken between European consumers and what has been their primary supplier."

As a result, we can now point out that Russia theoretically wants to prevent the NATO's expansion near its borders, but practically, Moscow actually wants to dominate the countries that were once part of the Soviet Union, where it can access and use natural resources. The loss of dominance over Europe's dependency on Russian energy resources is cause for concern for the Kremlin.

Behind this obvious objective, by now, to complete "buffer zone" from Belarus-Crimea-Abkhazia-South Ossetia-Transnistria to which Russia adds another "advanced buffer zone" made of Serbia-R.Srpska (BiH), in the Western Balkans, actually lies the interest of the Russian leaders in taking full control of the exploitation of Ukraine's resources, primarily energy, but also of the gas transportation system to Europe. We can safely say that the Kremlin's hidden agenda is to increase Europe dominance in the competition against the other powerful global actors, including China.

President V. Putin's decision to launch a large-scale re-invasion of Ukraine a year ago triggered a global shock with serious implications for all countries of the world, a shock that marked the abrupt end of 33 years of intense cooperation between countries, both regionally and globally, but especially for those in Europe. The war not only threatened European stability, but also affected regional and global food and energy security, including the Middle East and Africa, sending shockwaves through a world that is still only just recovering after the effects generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, we should not overlook the fact that both countries have suffered major economic declines since the start of the war. 40% of Ukraine's infrastructure was destroyed, while its gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen by 33%. The Ministry of Finance of Russia, let the public know that annual revenues decreased by 35% in 2022, while spendings increased by 59%. Although not as devastating as predicted, the Western sanctions have still affected Russia's economy. The many financial and trade sanctions imposed by the US and Europe since the beginning of the war have affected, but not to the expected extent, Russia's ability to carry out combat actions. Due to their cooperation with allies such as China, India and Iran, Russian consu-

mers have not yet felt a significant impact on their quality of life - as Alexandra Vacroux, executive director of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard pointed out.

Significant Geopolitical Developments in the Upcoming Period

It has become quite clear, especially considering recent developments, that Ukraine will increase the intensity of the counteroffensive for the expulsion of the Russian forces from the occupied territories. At the same time, Russia wants to have a back-up for the four provinces it annexed in September 2022.

Moscow hopes that Western decision in supporting Ukraine will slowly disappear. The US and possibly the UK will have elections in 2024, when the electorate could make significant changes, and a general election is scheduled in Germany, in 2025. All these events will generate various developments on the global level in the context in which the Russian President V. Putin may face an obstacle in his reelection in 2024. Therefore, we need to watch very carefully what decisive changes could be made that would contribute to the end of the conflict in Ukraine, especially since this war is proving to be a decisive factor in the future Ukrainian matrix, and it must be taken into account when it comes to make an assessment regarding Russia's future.

In the context of recent developments, the upcoming period will be characterized by the efforts nations have to make, to find the most suitable instruments to regulate the access to resources of all kinds, especially energy resources. They even have to restructure regional and international institutions.

As a radical change would be more difficult to implement, and given the interdependence between the economy, energy sector and state security, we can say that it would be much more appropriate to create consultative bodies in addition to the main international political, economic and security organizations, so they can manage potential security risks. Together they can take the necessary corrective measures whose strategic objectives would be to ensure, in a timely manner, access to energy resources so as not to affect the national security of a country.

Russia and China's growing influence in Europe, their aim to increase their domination and their influence as international actors, changed what we had come to know as political diplomacy. However, it is clear that Russia practically introduced a new concept in the context of the development of international relations, namely that of coercive diplomacy.

Therefore, now more than ever, we need to proactively adapt to the tactics, methods and means used by some international actors such as Russia, a power pole that stands out very prominently because it implemented conventional, asymmetric and hybrid military threats at the same time.

In the same context, we should not overlook the fact that China is also implementing various plans to increase its regional and global influence. It intensified economic and political cooperation and development in accordance with the needs of the Belt and Road Initiative, an initiative perceived as an ambitious shift in Beijing's plans to project its growth and, by implication, economic and political influence worldwide.

I have also proved the weight of Chinese influence. There is a general belief that Beijing may have been led by Russia to believe that the invasion of Ukraine would be a quick one, which is now turning out to be a long war with an end very difficult to predict and which has drawn a harsh reaction from the West. As a result, for a Chinese economy that is also facing various problems, isolation from the West is not something it wants to risk. Dr. Yu Jie, a Chinese senior researcher in the Asia-Pacific Program, pointed out: "President Xi and his peers began to realize that cooperation with Russia comes with substantial limitations, and they cannot avoid undermining China's long-term political priorities and economic interests. Moreover, we can safely say that, while China has been preparing a lot for the accomplishment and implementation of a political and military cooperation with Russia, even during the Ukrainian counter-offensive. Yet, Beijing seems particularly surprised by Prigozhin's surprise rebellion. Chinese leaders are trying to avoid taking part in a domestic confrontation and an internal political struggle in Russia, at least overtly.

The geopolitical evolution in terms of power distributions on a regional and global level will undergo fundamental changes. Classic political, military and security alignments will strengthen. International institutions such as the UN or the OSCE will remain ineffective, because regional associations will increase in importance. Pressure for the Security Council to reform will increase.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has strengthened NATO's deterrence and increased its presence in Eastern Europe. V. Putin "managed to trick NATO into getting closer than ever" says Jamie Shea, with bigger exercises, more training and strategies. An essential matter - the support the USA provides NATO and Europe is basically of a political and military nature, and helped strengthen the two.

The main beneficiaries of Russia's war in Ukraine are China, India, Turkey, Iran and North Korea. They are taking advantage of the trade opportunities provided by Western sanctions. They are taking advantage of cheap Russian oil. China's bilateral trade with Russia has risen to a record of 190 billion USD, in

2022. China's exports of finished industrial products have risen nearly 40%. China (and to a lesser extent Turkey, India and Iran) is a suitable "middleman" for illicit transactions, helping Russia evade sanctions. Russia's long war on its western front provides additional opportunities for China to improve its position vis-à-vis the Russian Far East.

India has been quick to buy cheap Russian fuel and has benefited from being involved in the supply process of whatever Moscow can no longer get directly from the West. Russia's involvement in Ukraine has strengthened Recep Tayyip Erdogan's position in Syria. Turkey is the only NATO country to shoot down a Russian fighter jet (in 2015) and now enjoys a privileged position in Moscow, having bought the Russian S-400 air defense system and having its first nuclear power plant built by Rosatom.

Ukraine's experience sends a message to the rest of the world: if you have nuclear weapons, never give them up, but if you do not, do whatever you can to get them. Iran, Turkey, and the Arab and East Asian countries have learnt this lesson and have reason to doubt the USA's nuclear commitment. South Korea is already openly considering acquiring nuclear weapons. Like Japan, it would probably take less than two years to produce them. China and North Korea are expanding their nuclear arsenals; China hoping to match the arsenals of the nuclear superpowers, North Korea aiming to develop a deterrence of significant magnitude.

In Conclusion, We Emphasize That...

The war in Ukraine has entered a new phase: some anticipate a dangerous escalation, while others see it as an opportunity to start negotiations and reach some kind of conclusion after the conflict.

As part of the counteroffensive, Ukrainian troops appear to have made significant progress in the south and east of the country. Ukraine's troops have been scouting and studying Russia's military structures for months, and the latest moves represent different phase of those operations. If, last year, in the beginning of the conflict, Ukraine surprised the world, not only by its strong defense, repelling the advance of the Russian forces towards Kyiv, but also by recapturing Kharkiv and Kherson later, the latest offensive seems to be focused on the key region of Zaporizhzhia. However, the disastrous floods caused by the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam have somewhat narrowed down their options and slowed the Ukrainian operations in the region.

The counteroffensive will continue over the coming months as Ukraine builds on Western support and tries to push a narrative that with the necessary support, victory will be within reach. Despite the reservations expressed by some parties, most Western nations will continue to provide the necessary support. As we well know, Ukraine received the Patriot air defense system from the US and Germany, as well as Britain's "Storm Shadow" cruise missiles. Justin Trudeau announced that Canada would provide military aid to Ukraine, valued at 500 million Canadian dollars.

From the war effort of the last 16 months it is clear that Russia, despite its overwhelming military superiority, will not succeed decisively defeating Ukraine. It once again managed to repel Russian forces from key areas with the help of Western technology and force of will. But Russia seems to have time on its side, as it is now very important for Ukraine to get some decisive victories on the battlefield, so that, if necessary, it can go to the negotiating table as a positional power. The West would also like to have a seat at the negotiating table, so that the economic toll this war has taken on the world can be diminished. But would V. Putin, after destroying Russia's reputation as a credible military force, be interested in an agreement reached at the negotiating table? Regardless of which path this latest counteroffensive takes, it will have a significant influence not only on the war in Ukraine, but also on the new global order.

The latest events caused by the Wagner Group, including seizing the headquarters of the Southern Military District in Rostov-on-Don, which largely served as an advanced command center for the Russian military forces, will weaken the command and control of the Russian forces. A confused or broken chain of command will have a significant impact on the Russian military's ability to mount an effective defense and a coordinated response to the Ukrainian counteroffensive. Certainly, Prigozhin's rebellion will weaken the command structure of the Russian military a fact that Ukraine take advantage of, on the battlefield.

The war the Russian President V. Putin chose to wage in Ukraine can be seen as a global historical event, marking the final act of the post-Cold War era and the beginning of a new one, not yet written. The spectrum of future developments that ranges from a volatile new cold or warm war involving other international actors, to a frozen conflict in Ukraine or a major post-Putin settlement, with Russia part of a revised European security architecture.

The only observation about the war in Ukraine and Russia's evolution as a state is that all existing certainties have disappeared and it remains to be seen which adjective we will be able to use more often in our strategic level analyses: "possible" or "probable"?

II. EUROPE - THE WAR IN UKRAINE



Who Wins from the War in Ukraine?

Prof. Ph.D. Nicolae RADU

On the morning of February 24, 2022, Russia signed the attack order on Ukraine, the basis of the Russian intervention in Ukraine (...) being “Po Zakonu”, i.e. *in accordance with the law* (Stancu, 2019). Should the need for war be stronger than the desire for peace?

Today, almost 500 days after the start of the war, there is talk of the Ukrainian counter-offensive against the Russians! How much is truth, how much is manipulation?

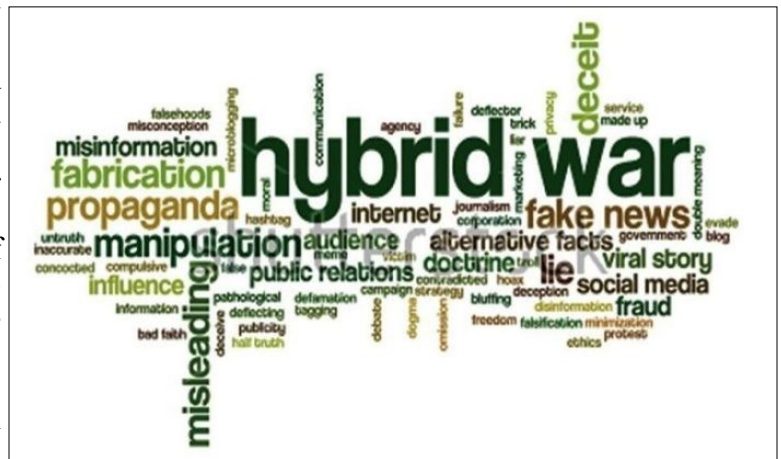
Although the war with Ukraine will not end soon, with far too many interests being directed towards Russia’s internal resources, the end of the war must be encouraged, especially as the nuclear threat grows by the day!

Disinformation, the “false correlation” of some events, amplifies insecurity and opens unwanted doors, including the adoption of political-military decisions under the impulse of emotions, with a lethal effect on peace (Bahador, 2015). Are Ukraine’s independence and its desire to join NATO and the European Union the real reasons that started this war?

Although disinformation, for strategic purposes, is encouraged, fabricated information and fiction promoted as “truths” undermine the credibility of concerns for the restoration of peace, even when it comes to the war in Ukraine. Similar situations were encountered in the war in Iraq, in the war in Syria, but also in the case of the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Disinformation is a powerful weapon! “The Ghost from Kiev”, a kind of Rambo for air combat associated, on the one hand, with Volodymyr Zelensky, Vitali Khlitschko and Miss Ukraine and, on the other hand, with Vladimir Putin, Sergei Lavrov, and the mercenaries of the Wagner group, point out that the war in Ukraine is also a media war. Simultaneously with the conventional war in Ukraine, there is a large-scale battle that takes place in cyberspace, in which some of the most feared hackers in the world are involved, united under the banner “Anonymous”!

The Russian diplomatic and informational campaign presented Moscow’s actions in Ukraine as legal or circling a grey area of generally accepted international law norms, an area where precedent makes the difference when it comes to interpretation. For example, the precedent of Western intervention in Kosovo was used extensively (Stancu, 2019).



Source: <https://in-cuiul-catarii.info/2022/05/23/asistam-la-un-razboi-hibrid-19164>

Who Wins by Promoting Lies?

While peace was supposed to remain the only topic on the agenda of the G20 meetings, Poland announced that it was hit by two Russian missiles, the hits resulting in two deaths! Although Russia denied the attacks, claiming “deliberate provocations”, the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that “launching Russian missiles on NATO territory is an attack on collective security”. How much is true? How much is disinformation? Balance in a world marked by uncertainty?

The President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis, sent a message of support stating that “Romania is fully in solidarity with our friend and ally Poland”, adding “We are NATO”, and the Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, called an urgent meeting of the Committee for National Security and Defence, and Dmitriy Kuleba, the Ukrainian Foreign Minister, requested a NATO Summit for joint actions against Russia! Things went back to normal once the US president, Joe Biden assessed that it was “unlikely” that the two missiles had been launched from Russia!

Who actually launched the missiles and why? “Open Sources”, US officials are already saying that the missiles were launched by the Ukrainian army with the aim of destroying a Russian missile aimed at Poland! How many ex-Soviet S-300 air defence missile systems are in the Ukrainian military arsenal? Does fake news help secure peace?

Manipulation exists, as are the media representations used to demonize the enemy! The connection between operational missions and the outcomes of the war is extremely important. (Kofman & Rojanski, 2015) How can one interpret the statement of the Ukrainian president, Zelensky, according to which the Russians must be expelled from every corner of the Ukrainian land? Who controls the information flow?

Regardless of the scenarios, the dramatic events of the last two years, the loss of human lives, the threats of a nuclear war, but also the “cholera epidemic” must bring all those preoccupied with the future of humanity to the negotiating table!

In September 2022, the Russians accused the Ukrainians of attacking the Zaporozhye nuclear powerplant, the largest in Europe! Today, the Ukrainians accuse Russia of a real “ecocide”, namely of nuclear terrorism! Why do Ukrainians and Russians accuse each other?

On the night of June 6, at 02.50, the dam at Kahovka, on the Dnieper was blown up! According to the Ukrainian presidential administration, after the destruction of the dam, 16,000 people were exposed to floods, but also to “over 150 tons of industrial oil” that spilled into the Dnieper! An unwanted piece of news that requires reflection! The destruction of the Kahovka dam has consequences on the settlements near the city of Kherson, but also on the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant, as well as on the water supply of the Crimean Peninsula, annexed in 2014 and under Russian control! Who are the real culprits? Who needs “ghosts”?

According to “Open Sources”, and France Presse, the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, proposed to the presidents of Ukraine and Russia, Volodymyr Zelensky and Vladimir Putin, to “establish an international inquiry commission to clarify all the aspects related to the destruction of the dam from Nova Kahovka, in the south of Ukraine”. Finding out the truth is not impossible, and yet what good does it do, when the interest for peace is more and more distant? Evidence of a criminal act cannot be neglected, whether it is the Ukrainians or the Russians!

We do not need to go deeply into behavioural analysis to be able to speak of such state of despair the Russians are in that they became suicidal? Who is interested in resurrecting the kamikaze terrorist? “Open Sources” help us paint a picture of the enemy to mobilize the public opinion. (Bahador, 2015) Who wants to portray Russia as a global threat? Who has the mission to “demonize” the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and depict him as a terrorist?

When we analyse a terrorist act, we cannot base our analysis on political statements only! Terrorism is an unconventional combat tactic used to achieve political goals, but also to instil fear through the calculated use of violence! *Fear is an essential discursive means for legitimizing political decisions, where actors, actions and certain events can be presented as a “threat” to society. Furthermore, certain fears can be insinuated in public communications to distract people from other fears or conflicts.* (Ventsel, A., Hansson, S., Madisson, M. L., & Sazonov, V., 2021)

The type of the terrorist act can be discerned by knowing the violent actions inflicted on the population that is not involved in the conflict but also by identifying the methods, the criminal acts committed with the aim of causing panic, and the participants – individuals or groups that present themselves as non-state. Taking this into account, who appeals to terrorism by increasing terror?

In this context, we must highlight the position of the president of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embalo, who also chairs the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): “for the international

community, the only thing on the agenda is the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, although there are numerous wars on the African continent as well. I believe that should there be a serious dialogue, this war could end very quickly. But who wants the war in Ukraine to end? Prolonging the conflict and refusing to dialogue are equally reprehensible, because they feed each other in a spiral of destruction. Counterintelligence/counterespionage for example demands vigilance, even when the truth seems absolute.” (Predoiu, 2023)

Psychological Warfare is Omnipresent!

The war in Ukraine is far from over, especially since we are dealing with a media conflict. (Taras, 2022) Russia accuses the US of being involved in this conflict. The US authorities, however, reject the accusations. Although the need for peace is present, who takes into account Russia’s legitimate historical interests? What does a possible accession of Ukraine to NATO mean for the Kremlin regime? How true is the stake of this war and the desire control Russia’s natural resources? Who wants to remove the Russian President Vladimir Putin from power?

In this context, is the EU’s willingness to turn to other gas suppliers, accidental? Undermining Russia’s leading position on the European gas market by known or secret alliances cannot be neglected! The energy supply route was redrawn with the invasion of Ukraine.

Who wins and who loses following the war in Ukraine?

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II. EUROPA - ROMÂNIA



Romania...Who Are We, Who Are our Friends and Enemies?

Prof. univ. Ph.D. Cristian BARNA

The Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic equation represents the premise of the attempts to outline the geostrategic perspectives of our country. Gheorghe I. Brătianu showed that the sea and the mountains represent not only a vital area for Romania, but are the very elements of our existence, stressing that the great powers that wanted to have control over the Black Sea also needed to control the land between the Carpathians and the Danube.

Furthermore, Romania is “a country along the freeway of the Danube peoples”, situated between geopolitical areas of great interest, as stated by Johan Rudolf Kjellén¹, or “a country of European necessity”, as stated by Nicolae Iorga.

Perhaps this is why, over time, Romania had to be part of different geopolitical alliances, generated or generating a regional power balance, which was, most of the time, based on a zero sum game. These alliances meant Romania had to take various sides when it came to positioning itself with the great powers. These actions came to be especially due to the need to have its territorial sovereignty guaranteed. Some of these alliances followed a natural course, others, such as the Warsaw Pact, were imposed.

After the collapse of communism, Romania began to be looked at from a “pivot state” perspective, a theory that says a country is located at the crossroads of the geopolitical axes of the West, Eurasia, Central Asia and the Middle East. According to Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski², taking into account its geopolitical and geostrategic position, Romania has the necessary attributes of a geopolitical “pivot”, being a country whose importance derives from its location and from the vulnerability, it can show towards the behaviour of the geostrategic players in its vicinity, such as the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

As such, the first years after the fall of communism put Romania through a geostrategic and geopolitical identity crisis. This was because it was located on the “outskirts” of the Western world.



Source: <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/international/sondaj-doar-37-dintre-romani-sunt-de-parere-ca-rusia-este-inamicul-in-razboiul-din-ucraina.html>

¹Johan Rudolf Kjellén (1864-1922) was a Swedish political scientist and politician, famous for the term geopolitics. Together with Alexander von Humboldt, Carl Ritter and Friedrich Ratzel, Kjellén laid the ground for the German geopolitics.

²Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski (1928-2017) was a US political scientist that was Jimmy Carter's national security advisor from 1977 until 1981. He, Henry Kissinger and Samuel P. Huntington are considered some of the greatest US global strategists.

It had not yet been accepted in the “family” of Western democracies (EU and NATO), and could not benefit from the security guarantees that deeply transformed the international environment. It could bring danger to its borders. After the collapse of the USSR, one of those dangers was the attempt of the Russian Federation to become a regional power and to put into practice, for the umpteenth time, its expansionist dreams.

During those years, the main concern was that Romania and other Eastern European countries could become a “buffer zone” between the West and the Russian Federation. It could turn into “a border state” that would set the limits of the “Russian influence”. Geopolitical concepts such as “buffer zone”, “border state” or “stability flank” were highly popular when it came to Romania’s geostrategic position, in a geographical area identified as “Eastern Europe”, “Southeastern Europe” the post-Soviet space” etc.

Haunted by this concern – Romania’s geopolitical position – it came up with a vision that materialised into “The Integrated Concept of Romania’s National Security”. The Concept took shape because, ever since 1994 it had a as a “geostrategic” corollary the disadvantage of being part of a “buffer zone”. It lied between the West and the post-Soviet space, with conflicts in its vicinity (the Balkans, Moldova, the Middle East, etc.) with no “stable allies” and “security guarantees”, faced with the tendencies of the great powers to promote their interests in the region, offensively.

In this unstable geopolitical and geostrategic environment, the document mentioned the role that Romania can play in ensuring regional stability and security, given its geographical location on the Danube and on the shores of the Black Sea.

In the beginning of the 20th century, Romania’s position was established at the convergence of four geopolitical areas: Central Europe – “a future area of stability and prosperity”, South-Eastern Europe – “the main area of instability and insecurity”, the Commonwealth of Independent States – “undergoing reform” and the Black Sea – “an area of opportunity, but also a source of risk”.

At the dawn of this century, geopolitical analyses of Western inspiration saw Romania as a part either of the “Great Middle East” or of the “Wider Black Sea Region”, a historic moment that coincided with our country’s accession to NATO.

Romania’s historic accession to NATO equalled the legitimization of Romania’s strategic status in the Euro-Atlantic world, hence obtaining security and territorial sovereignty guarantees, and getting rid of a legitimacy and credibility handicap that deprived us of a vital source of power, as well as of a strategic identity with strong geopolitical valences.

At present, as a NATO and EU Member, Romania has the opportunity to moderate the balance of power in the Wider Black Sea Region. Its most suitable geopolitical attribute can be a “strategic platform” involved in the “big game” in the Black Sea that both in the past and in the present is defined by concepts such as strategic confinement and deterrence.

George Friedman predicted that in 100 years Romania’s geopolitical interest would imply staying safe from the Russian Federation and Turkey.

Aware of the bellicose statements of some Russian officials, and of the so-called actions that the Russian Federation could take in Transnistria or in the Black Sea, and given the European “strategic balance”, coupled with the fact that Romania is an important NATO pillar, half of George Friedman’s prediction became a foreign policy and national security objective. The Russian Federation represents the main external threat to Romania’s national security.

II. EUROPE - MIGRATION



Tracing the Migration Route to Europe: Finding Long-Term Solutions

Oluwasogo Joseph DAIRO
(Nigeria)

Migration has been a serious global issue, with millions of people leaving their homelands in search of safety, better economic opportunities, or a chance at a new life. Europe, in particular, has witnessed a significant influx of migrants in recent years. Understanding the migration routes and addressing the challenges posed by this phenomenon requires a comprehensive approach that combines short-term, mid-term, and long-term solutions.

Tracing the Migration Route:

To comprehend the migration routes to Europe, it is crucial to acknowledge the complex factors driving people to leave their homes. Political instability, political persecution, armed conflicts, poverty, lack of opportunities, and environmental degradation are among the key drivers of migration. Understanding these push factors enables us to trace the paths migrants take to reach Europe.

Short-term Solutions:

Short-term solutions are primarily focused on addressing immediate humanitarian needs and ensuring the safety and well-being of migrants. These measures include:

a) **Search and Rescue Operations:** Strengthening search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and other migration routes is essential to prevent loss of life at sea. Coordination among European (source countries and countries on the route) countries and international organizations should be enhanced to respond effectively to distress calls and ensure timely assistance.

b) **Humanitarian Assistance:** Providing migrants with access to basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare is crucial. Collaborative efforts between governments, NGOs, and international agencies are necessary to ensure adequate support for migrants upon their arrival in host countries. And this should include the contribution of source countries.



Source: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/meps-clash-over-new-eu-asylum-and-migration-proposals>

c) Fair and Efficient Asylum Systems: Developing fair and efficient asylum systems is essential to handle the large influx of asylum seekers. Streamlining asylum procedures, ensuring proper legal representation, and implementing effective integration policies are key components of a robust asylum system.

Mid-term Solutions:

Mid-term solutions aim to address the root causes of migration and mitigate the need for people to undertake dangerous journeys. These measures include:

a) Development Aid and Investment: Increased investment in developing countries can create economic opportunities, reduce poverty, and improve living conditions. Development aid should focus on promoting sustainable economic growth, strengthening education and healthcare systems, and building infrastructure to enhance the overall well-being of communities. And the bottlenecks in the aid system should be addressed especially to ensure transparency and effectiveness.

b) Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding: Addressing political instability and armed conflicts is crucial in preventing forced migration. Diplomatic efforts, mediation, and peacebuilding initiatives should be supported to find sustainable solutions to conflicts and promote stability in regions of origin.

c) Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation: Climate change-induced displacement is becoming a reality for many communities. Supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, including renewable energy projects, sustainable agriculture practices, and water management initiatives, can help reduce the environmental pressures that drive migration.

Long-term Solutions:

Long-term solutions involve comprehensive strategies aimed at fostering global cooperation and addressing the structural challenges associated with migration. These solutions include:

a) Comprehensive Migration Policies: Developing comprehensive migration policies that strike a balance between the interests of host countries and the rights of migrants is crucial. These policies should focus on orderly and regular migration, addressing labor market needs, family reunification, and providing opportunities for legal pathways.

b) Education and Awareness: Promoting education and awareness about migration, its causes, and its impacts is essential to foster a more inclusive and empathetic society. By combating xenophobia, stereotypes, and misinformation, societies can create an environment that values diversity and encourages integration.

c) Global Partnership and Responsibility-Sharing: Migration is a global issue that requires global cooperation. Encouraging international collaboration, burden-sharing, and responsibility-sharing among countries is crucial to address the challenges posed by migration effectively.

In conclusion, finding long-term solutions requires a multi-faceted approach. By addressing the immediate humanitarian needs of migrants, tackling the root causes of migration, and developing comprehensive policies and global partnerships.

III. MIDDLE EAST - GEOPOLITICS



Geopolitical Shifts: Recent Developments Impacting the Dynamics of the Middle East

*PhD. Mohamad AL MOKDAD
(Lebanon)*

The Middle East has long been a region of geopolitical significance, with its complex web of historical, cultural, and political dynamics. In recent times, the region has witnessed a series of significant geopolitical shifts that are reshaping its landscape and influencing global affairs. Understanding these developments is crucial for comprehending the evolving dynamics in the Middle East and their implications for regional stability, international relations, and economic cooperation.

Geopolitical shifts refer to changes in power, alliances, and the distribution of influence among countries and non-state actors within a given region. Such shifts often result from a combination of internal and external factors, including changes in leadership, conflicts, diplomatic agreements, economic developments, and evolving global dynamics.

In the Middle East, recent developments have brought about significant changes in the geopolitical landscape. One of the most notable events has been the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020, which marked a historical breakthrough in normalizing relations between Israel and several Arab states, including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. This unprecedented agreement has redefined regional alliances, reshaped diplomatic relationships, and opened up new avenues for economic cooperation.

Moreover, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional organization consisting of six Arab states in the Persian Gulf, has experienced shifting dynamics. The rift between Qatar and several GCC member states, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt, has caused significant strains within the organization. However, recent efforts towards reconciliation have provided a glimmer of hope for restoring unity and collaboration within the GCC.

Simultaneously, the ongoing Iranian nuclear talks have captured the attention of the international community. Negotiations between Iran and world powers, aimed at reviving or amending the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), have far-reaching implications for regional security and stability. The outcome of these talks has the potential to shape the relationships between Iran, its neighbors, and major global powers, affecting the balance of power in the Middle East.



Source: https://www.stiripesurse.ro/pericolul-ignorarii-orientului-mijlociu_2740355.html

Furthermore, the recent withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan has raised concerns about the potential consequences for the Middle East. As the regional dynamics continues to evolve, the vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal could impact the rise of extremist groups and the influence of regional powers.

In light of these recent developments, it is crucial to closely monitor the geopolitical shifts in the Middle East and analyse their potential long-term consequences. This article delves into these developments, examining their impact on regional dynamics and highlighting the need for proactive engagement to address emerging challenges. By understanding the changing geopolitical landscape, stakeholders can navigate the complexities and opportunities presented by the evolving Middle East.

The Abraham Accords, signed in September 2020, represent a significant breakthrough in the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. The accords mark a series of agreements between Israel and several Arab states, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, aimed at normalizing diplomatic relations, enhancing economic cooperation, and fostering regional stability.

Prior to the Abraham Accords, Israel had only signed peace agreements with Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. The normalization of relations with the UAE and Bahrain was a groundbreaking development, as it marked the first public normalization of ties between Israel and Arab states in over two decades. Subsequently, Sudan and Morocco also joined the accords, further expanding the circle of normalization.

The accords have redefined regional alliances and reshaped diplomatic relationships in the Middle East. They have fostered a sense of cooperation and partnership between countries that were historically at odds with Israel due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The accords have provided an opportunity for these nations to collaborate on various fronts, including trade, tourism, technology, security, and cultural exchanges.

Economically, the Abraham Accords have opened up new avenues for trade and investment, creating opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs in the participating countries. Bilateral trade between Israel and the UAE, for instance, has flourished, with sectors such as technology, agriculture, healthcare, and finance witnessing increased cooperation. The accords have also facilitated the establishment of direct flights, enabling easier travel and enhancing people-to-people exchanges.

Furthermore, the Abraham Accords have had geopolitical implications beyond the countries directly involved. They have prompted a reassessment of traditional alliances in the Middle East. Previously, many Arab states had adhered to the Arab Peace Initiative, which called for the establishment of a Palestinian state as a prerequisite for normalizing relations with Israel. The accords challenged this paradigm by emphasizing the potential for regional cooperation independently of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

However, it is important to note that the Abraham Accords have generated mixed reactions in the region. While some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have expressed support for the accords, others, like Iran and Turkey, have criticized them, viewing them as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. The impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself remains a subject of debate, with proponents arguing that increased regional integration can bring opportunities for progress, while critics express concerns about the potential marginalization of the Palestinian cause.

In conclusion, the Abraham Accords have brought about a transformative shift in the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. By normalizing relations and redefining alliances, these agreements have paved the way for enhanced cooperation, economic opportunities, and diplomatic engagement among Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, and beyond. The long-term implications of the accords on regional stability, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and broader Middle East dynamics are still unfolding, and their impact will continue to shape the region's future trajectory.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional organization composed of six Arab states in the Persian Gulf: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar. For decades, the GCC has been a key platform for economic cooperation, security coordination, and political consultation among its member states. However, recent years have witnessed significant changes in the dynamics within the GCC, leading to shifts in alliances and strained relations among member countries.

One of the prominent challenges faced by the GCC is the rift between Qatar and several other member states, including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt. In June 2017, these countries severed diplomatic ties with Qatar, accusing it of supporting terrorism and meddling in their internal affairs. The move led to a blockade and imposed restrictions on Qatar, affecting trade, travel, and diplomatic relations in the region.

Efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis have been underway in recent years. In January 2021, the Al-Ula Declaration was signed during the GCC summit, marking a significant step towards reconciliation. The declaration aimed to restore diplomatic relations, lift the blockade on Qatar, and promote unity and cooperation within the GCC.

The Al-Ula Declaration has sparked hopes for a resolution to the rift and the restoration of GCC unity.

Since its signing, there have been positive developments, including the reopening of borders, the resumption of flights, and the restoration of diplomatic ties between Qatar and its neighboring countries. This has paved the way for renewed cooperation in various areas, such as economic integration, security collaboration, and joint initiatives.

The changing dynamics within the GCC have implications for regional stability and the balance of power in the Middle East. The rift highlighted underlying political differences and divergent priorities among member states, with each country pursuing its own interests and alliances. It has also exposed the vulnerability of the GCC's unity and the need for strengthened mechanisms to address internal disputes and maintain collective decision-making.

The recent reconciliation efforts represent an opportunity to rebuild trust, strengthen cooperation, and revitalize the GCC's role as a regional bloc. The restoration of diplomatic relations and the resumption of trade and travel have the potential to boost economic growth and enhance security cooperation. Moreover, a united GCC can play a more influential role in addressing common challenges, such as regional conflicts, terrorism, and economic diversification.

However, challenges remain in fully restoring GCC unity. While progress has been made, it will be essential to address the underlying issues that led to the rift and build mechanisms for conflict resolution and consensus-building. The divergent perspectives on regional issues, such as Iran's influence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the broader geopolitical landscape, will require ongoing dialogue and negotiation.

In conclusion, the dynamics within the GCC have experienced significant shifts due to the rift between Qatar and several member states. The recent reconciliation efforts have shown positive signs of progress, but sustained efforts are required to rebuild trust, foster unity, and address underlying issues. The resolution of internal disputes and the strengthening of cooperation within the GCC are crucial for regional stability, economic integration, and collective security in the face of evolving challenges in the Middle East.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, which culminated in the complete withdrawal of American troops in September 2021, has had a significant impact on Afghanistan, the region, and the broader international community. The implications of this withdrawal are multifaceted and have ramifications for security, political stability, regional dynamics, and counterterrorism efforts.

The withdrawal of U.S. forces has created a security vacuum in Afghanistan, allowing the Taliban to rapidly expand their territorial control and influence.

The Afghan government has faced challenges in maintaining control and security, leading to an increase in violence and instability across the country.

The departure of international military forces has impacted the capacity of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), which heavily relied on U.S. support, training, and funding.

The escalating conflict and deteriorating security situation have resulted in a humanitarian crisis, with thousands of Afghans displaced, facing food shortages, and lacking access to basic services.

The withdrawal has also led to an influx of Afghan refugees seeking safety and asylum in neighboring countries and beyond, placing a strain on host communities and international systems.

The U.S. withdrawal has raised concerns among neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, about the potential spillover of violence, increased terrorism, and the flow of refugees across their borders.

Regional powers, such as China, Russia, and India, have been closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan due to their strategic interests, including regional stability, counterterrorism efforts, and economic opportunities.

The withdrawal has raised concerns about the resurgence of extremist groups, including Al-Qaeda and ISIS, in Afghanistan. The presence of ungoverned spaces and the weakened Afghan security forces create an environment conducive to their reemergence.

The loss of U.S. military presence and intelligence capabilities hampers counterterrorism efforts, making it challenging to monitor and respond effectively to terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan.

The withdrawal has raised concerns about the fate of women's rights, human rights, and the progress made in Afghan society over the past two decades.

There are fears that the Taliban's return to power may lead to the erosion of hard-fought gains in gender equality, access to education, and women's participation to public life.

The U.S. withdrawal has raised questions about the credibility and commitment of the United States as a security partner and its role in global affairs.

Allies and partners have grappled with the implications of the withdrawal and the need to recalibrate their regional strategies and engagements.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has had profound implications across multiple dimensions. The security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated, with the Taliban gaining ground and posing challenges to the stability of the country. The humanitarian crisis, regional concerns, and potential terrorist threats have prompted regional and international actors to reassess their policies and engagements. The impact of the withdrawal will continue to unfold, and its long-term consequences on Afghanistan and the wider region are yet to be fully determined.

In conclusion, the Middle East has experienced significant geopolitical shifts in recent months, with a range of developments impacting the region's dynamics. The Abraham Accords have reshaped diplomatic relations and redefined alliances, opening up new avenues for cooperation and economic integration. However, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and divergent perspectives within the region remain important considerations.

The changing dynamics within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have highlighted the challenges to maintaining unity and cooperation among member states. The recent reconciliation efforts provide hope for restoring regional stability and addressing common challenges, but sustained efforts are required to address underlying issues and build mechanisms for conflict resolution.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has had far-reaching consequences, including a security vacuum, increased violence, and a humanitarian crisis. It has also raised concerns about the resurgence of extremist groups and the flow of refugees, impacting regional dynamics and counterterrorism efforts. The future trajectory of Afghanistan and its implications for the broader region will require ongoing attention and engagement from the international community.

These recent developments underscore the complex and interconnected nature of the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. They highlight the importance of closely monitoring evolving dynamics, fostering dialogue and cooperation, and seeking comprehensive solutions to regional challenges. Proactive engagement, respect for sovereignty, and a nuanced understanding of the region's complexities will be vital in navigating the evolving dynamics and working towards peace, stability, and prosperity in the Middle East.

III. MIDDLE EAST - ISRAEL



The Periodicity of the Violence between Israel and Hamas

Andreea Cristina STANCA

A Brief History

The year 2006 marks a change in the Palestinian political architecture – the arrival of Hamas on the political scene, which won the elections for the leadership of the Gaza Strip.

Founded in 1987, Hamas originates from the Muslim Brotherhood that operated in the Gaza Strip, breaking away from it at the time when the Palestinians began their mutiny against the Israeli occupation. So, in the context of the first *Intifada* that took place between 1987-1994, Hamas became more and more present in the dynamics of the events in the Gaza Strip.

Towards the end of the Palestinian uprising, Hamas became actively involved in the fight against the State of Israel, with the first terrorist attack carried out by the Palestinian organization. The violent actions taken by Hamas have been strongly condemned by the actors of the international system, including the European Union (EU), the United States of America (USA), Great Britain, Israel and more.

In this regard, the Palestinian organization is on the list of EU's terrorist organizations¹. However, there are also countries that support Hamas, both financially and ideologically. Perhaps the most important actors whose support is essential for Hamas are Iran and Syria².

It is worth mentioning that initially, Hamas received financial support from Israel for the development of Palestinian society, with schools, hospitals and more being built. Therefore, the relationship between the two actors was not always conflictual. However, the moment the Hamas charter was published the interaction between the two changed significantly.



The destruction by the Israeli army of the building in which the commander of Islamic Jihad, Ali Ghali, was located

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-kills-senior-gaza-commander-militants-fire-rockets-across-border-2023-05-11/>

¹Carmen Avram (2021), *The Gaza conflict and Hamas rocket stockpiles*, European Parliament, May 18, 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-002665_EN.html

²Mirren Gidda (2014), *Hamas Still Has Some Friends Left*, TIME, July 25, 2014, <https://time.com/3033681/hamas-gaza-palestine-israel-egypt/>

It contained the main objectives of the organization, the most relevant ones referring to the fight against the Jewish state and its destruction³. So, this can be considered the origin of the dispute between Hamas and Israel, a conflict that escalated and still endures.

The Implications of the Conflict

As I previously stated, in the history of the interaction between Hamas and Israel there was a peaceful period characterized by cooperation. But, nevertheless, in the evolution of the relationship between the two actors there are increasingly violent events, the conflict escalating and causing victims on both sides.

By 2021, the conflict that began in 1987 had caused more than 14,000 casualties, most of them Palestinians⁴. The data shows that from 2021 up until now, the number continues to rise; during this time, there have been more than 800 victims⁵. The implications of the conflict also include issues such as low living standards for the Palestinians, security threats to Israel and even conflicts between the two societies.

Access to medical services, education, or even water and electricity resources are limited in the Gaza Strip. After Hamas came to power, the Palestinian population became isolated from the outside world, access to jobs outside the territory changed, so building a stable economy was impossible⁶.

Hence, this conflict has led to the deterioration of the living standards of the Palestinians, who are the victims of the conflict. At the same time, the Israeli population are also directly affected by the conflict, with the violence causing casualties among the civilian population.



The launch of rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/10/israeli-palestinian-fighting-ongoing-as-egypt-ceasefire-falters>

The 2023 Dynamics

If we take a look at the evolution of events, we notice that there are moments when violence deescalates and periods when there are direct confrontations that cause casualties among both Palestinians and Israelis.

Through time, there have been moments when the intensity of violence has reached devastating levels – the years 2008-2009, 2014, 2018, 2021 and 2023. The events in 2023 prove that solving the conflict between Israel and Hamas is impossible. At present, there are no prospects for the violence to end.

In the beginning of May 2023, the violence intensified; hundreds of rockets were launched towards the south of Israel, but also towards the Gaza Strip. Even though Egypt mediated a ceasefire, statements by political leaders show that violence will resume.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, stated that: “This round is not over. [...] We tell terrorists and those who send them: we see you everywhere. You cannot hide, and we choose the time and place to strike⁷.” At the same time, Hamas stated that “the resistance is ready for all options [...] If Israel persists in its aggression and arrogance, dark days lay ahead⁸.”

³Hamas Charter, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp

⁴The Israel-Palestine conflict has claimed 14,000 lives since 1987, *The Economist*, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/05/18/the-israel-palestine-conflict-has-claimed-14000-lives-since-1987>.

⁵Data on casualties, <https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties>.

⁶Gregory Harms, Todd M. Ferry (2017), “The Palestine-Israel Conflict. A Basic Introduction”, London: Pluto Press, 212.

⁷Israel-Palestine conflict: Fighting ongoing as ceasefire falters, *AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES*, May 10, 2023.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/10/israeli-palestinian-fighting-ongoing-as-egypt-ceasefire-falters>.

⁸Israel-Palestine conflict: Fighting ongoing as ceasefire falters, *AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES*, May 10, 2023.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/10/israeli-palestinian-fighting-ongoing-as-egypt-ceasefire-falters>.

So, the statements of the political elites illustrate that violence lingers, thus creating a conflictual future. The deep roots of the conflict illustrate its complexity, so finding a solution in the near future is almost impossible. The continuity of conflict causes deep consequences both from a security and a humanitarian point of view. The cyclicity of violence generates certain costs, the most important one being the loss of human lives.

Therefore, we can say that the strategies of the two actors cause irreparable damages that fuel the conflict.

III. MIDDLE EAST - ISRAEL



Netanyahu at a Crossroads

Eva J. KOULOURIOTIS
(Greece)

“We are confident we can handle any threat on our own.” This sentence was part of a brief statement by Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, after a meeting with the Ministerial Committee for National Security Affairs to assess the large-scale drill conducted by the IDF, which began in late May and it lasted for about ten days.

These drills are the largest for the Israeli Defence Forces in years. They simulate a multi-front war that has political and military implications at a time, in my opinion, that is the tensest experienced by the political and military leadership in Israel, in light of differences that began to appear publicly with the main ally of Israel in Washington on the one hand, and of the rapid developments of the Iranian nuclear program on the other.

On the 31st of May, an Israeli delegation arrived in Washington. The delegation consisted of the Israeli National Security Adviser, Tzachi Hanegbi, the Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs, Ron Dermer, in addition to the head of the Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet), Ronen Bar. The delegation met with a number of American officials, headed by the Director of the CIA, William Burns and Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Jake Sullivan.



Source: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2331141/middle-east>

These meetings came after leaks about a preliminary agreement reached between Washington and Tehran with Omani and Qatari mediation on the Iranian nuclear program, the agreement is based on the quid-pro-quo principle, where Tehran reduces its uranium enrichment to less than 60% in exchange for Washington releasing part of the frozen funds for Tehran. This agreement, if implemented, may be the beginning of a return to larger negotiations to formulate a new, more comprehensive agreement. This news, in my opinion, was the reason for the visit of the Israeli security delegation to Washington.

There is no clear information about what was discussed during this visit, but we, as observers, can put forward a close perception of what was discussed in closed rooms in Washington between Israeli and American officials. It is clear that the participation of the Shabak chief confirms that the delegation has intelligence related to Iran’s nuclear program that was discussed, as well as that parts of the nuclear military installations began to be transferred to fortified sites at a depth of 60 and 80 meters underground, which makes their destruction impossible or at the very least complicated, in addition to information about the amount of highly enriched uranium recently collected by Tehran.

The sharing of this information by the Israeli side with the Americans came in parallel with Netanyahu's rejection of any temporary agreement. This direct message from Israel was met with tension and annoyance on the American side, that translated into the cancellation of Blinken's visit to Israel scheduled for the 9th of May. This is what prompted Netanyahu to say in his statement mentioned at the beginning of this article that Israel is able to move on its own.

But can Israel move against Iran's nuclear program on its own, and what are the alternative options?

At the outset, it must be emphasised that the time factor is very important in the event that leaks are confirmed about the transfer of Iranian nuclear facilities underground. This reality puts Netanyahu in front of weeks or months at most before Iran's nuclear program becomes completely protected from any external targeting. Therefore, the solutions on the table are shrinking between a limited strike that will delay Iran's nuclear program for months or a year at the latest, or a comprehensive strike on the program or the diplomatic option through confidence in Washington's vision and the decisions of its officials.

As for the diplomatic option, it is clear that Israeli officials do not trust Tehran's intentions on the one hand, just as they no longer trust that Washington really does not want Tehran to become a nuclear state. Indeed, a large part of Israeli officials have become convinced that a nuclear Iran is not a threat to Washington and its international influence. Consequently, this perception diminishes more and more trust between Israeli and American officials.

Recently, there are indications of de-escalation between Tehran and Washington, and one of its features is the visit of officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency to Tehran, which was followed by Iraq's release in favour of Iran of 3 billion dollars that were frozen. Despite the official American denial that they reached any agreement, these indicators are certainly part of a larger scheme.

As for militarily, yes, the Israel Defence Forces has the military and logistical capacity to strike Iran's nuclear program and destroy it completely, but the biggest danger is after this strike and the reaction of Iran and its militias in the region. If this is the case, Israel becomes in need of American cover in front of thousands of missiles and drones that will launch from Lebanon, Gaza, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, in addition to Iran.

Among the lectures that are taught to IDF officers, there is a section related to the psychological state of the officer before and after making important decisions, where the officer may have to make a dangerous and insane one, but it is important for him to be calm to deal with the utmost ingenuity with the results of his decision.

Netanyahu, a former army officer himself, knows very well that he is at a crossroads that may be the most important for Israel since the Camp David agreement with Egypt. Either he will accept Iran, which has excess power through which it will redefine the power equation in the Middle East in general, or he will choose the decision to go to war on his own.

IV. MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA) - SUDAN



Sudan's Ongoing Struggle

Oluwasogo Joseph DAIRO
(Nigeria)

Introduction

Sudan, the largest country in Africa, has long been marred by armed conflicts that have profoundly affected its people and stability. The nation's complex history, diverse ethnicities, and regional disparities have contributed to a series of internal and external confrontations, causing immense human suffering and impeding socio-economic progress.

Some those conflicts are highlighted below.

The Darfur Conflict

One of the most well-known armed conflicts in Sudan is the Darfur Conflict, which erupted in 2003. The conflict primarily arose due to ethnic tensions between Arab herders and non-Arab farmers over scarce resources, including land and water. What began as a localized dispute quickly escalated into a full-fledged humanitarian crisis with devastating consequences.

The government's response, in conjunction with Arab militia groups known as the *Janjaweed*, led to widespread violence against non-Arab ethnic groups, resulting in the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives and the displacement of millions. The conflict drew international attention and condemnation, leading to the involvement of

peacekeeping forces under the United Nations and African Union (UNAMID). While some progress has been made in recent years, achieving lasting peace in Darfur remains a complex challenge, as underlying issues such as political marginalization and resource scarcity continue to persist.

South Sudanese Independence and Aftermath

Sudan's history of armed conflicts is also intertwined with South Sudan's independence. After years of civil war and political strife, South Sudan gained independence in July 2011, creating the world's youngest nation. However, this separation did not usher in lasting peace for either country.



Source: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/06/15/sudanese-army-accuses-paramilitary-of-killing-west-darfur-governor_6031975_4.html

Instead, South Sudan plunged into its own internal conflict in 2013, when President Salva Kiir accused his former deputy, Riek Machar, of attempting a coup. The power struggle between these political leaders ignited ethnic violence, leading to a devastating civil war that claimed countless lives and displaced millions.

The Sudanese Civil War

The Sudanese Civil War is one of the longest and deadliest conflicts in modern history. It began in 1955, even before Sudan gained independence from British and Egyptian colonial rule in 1956. The conflict was rooted in various factors, including ethnic, religious, and regional tensions, as well as disagreements over the distribution of power and resources.

The war took a new turn in 1983 when the Sudanese government, led by President Jaafar Nimeiry, imposed Islamic Sharia law on the entire country, including non-Muslim majority regions. This move deepened the divide between the predominantly Arab and Muslim north and the ethnically diverse and Christian-majority south.

The conflict in Southern Sudan escalated into a full-scale war, leading to widespread violence and humanitarian crises. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 brought a temporary respite, culminating in the secession of South Sudan in 2011. However, the CPA's implementation faced challenges, and tensions persisted in regions like the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, leading to further conflicts.

Armed Groups in Sudan

1. Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-North (SPLM/A-N): This group is an armed faction that emerged from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) but operates mainly in the regions of South Kordofan and Blue Nile. It has been involved in the conflict in these regions, fighting against government forces.

2. Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A): The SLM/A is a rebel group representing the interests of various marginalized communities in Darfur. It seeks to address political and economic grievances faced by these communities.

3. Justice and Equality Movement (JEM): Another prominent rebel group in Darfur, the JEM aims to bring attention to issues of social justice, political marginalization, and economic disparities in the region.

4. Sudan Liberation Movement/Army-Abdul Wahid (SLM/A-AW): This faction is a splinter group from the original SLM/A and operates in Darfur. Led by Abdul Wahid Nur, it has been involved in the Darfur conflict.

5. Rapid Support Forces (RSF): The RSF is a government-backed paramilitary group that has played a significant role in armed conflicts, including in Darfur. It has faced allegations of human rights abuses and has been deployed by the government in various military operations. The RSF emerged from Janjaweed, Janjaweed is a term used to refer to Arab militias accused of committing atrocities in Darfur during the early 2000s. Some of these groups have since been integrated into official security forces as the RSF.

6. Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF): The SAF is the official military of Sudan and has been involved in various conflicts within the country, including in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile.

7. Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLM-IO): This faction emerged from the South Sudanese civil war but has also been active in Sudan. It is linked to the SPLM/A-N and has engaged in hostilities with the government forces.

8. Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF): The SRF is an alliance of various rebel groups, including the SPLM/A-N, SLM/A, and JEM. The alliance aims to work collectively to address issues of conflict and underdevelopment in Sudan.

9. Beja Congress: This group represents the interests of the Beja ethnic group in eastern Sudan and advocates for their political and economic rights.

Others are:

- Abyei Liberation Front;
- Alliance of Revolutionary Forces of West Sudan;
- Anyanya;
- Anyanya II;
- Azania Liberation Front;
- Civil Authority for the New Sudan;
- Eastern Front (Sudan);
- Equatoria Defense Force;

- Janjaweed;
- Liberation and Justice Movement;
- Lords Resistance Army;
- National Convention of New Sudan;
- National Movement for Reform and Development;
- National Redemption Front;
- Nuer White Army;
- Popular Front for National Rebirth;
- Rashaida Free Lions;
- SPLA-Nasir;
- Sudan Liberation Movement/Army;
- Sudan People's Defense Forces/Democratic Front;
- Sudan Revolutionary Front;
- Sudanese Awakening Revolutionary Council;
- Tajammu al-Arabi;
- Uganda Army (1971–1980);

It is important to understand that the situation in Sudan is fluid, and armed group dynamics can change rapidly due to shifting alliances, government actions, and international involvement.

This year after weeks of escalating tensions, open military clashes broke out on April 15 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). A power struggle is at the center of the fighting.

At the heart of the clashes are two men: Sudan's military leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the commander of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

Until recently, they were allies. The duo worked together to topple ousted Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and played a pivotal role in the military coup in 2021.

However, tensions arose during negotiations to integrate the RSF into the national military as part of plans to restore civilian rule.

The main question: who would be subordinate to who under the new hierarchy.

These hostilities, are the culmination of what both parties view as an existential fight for dominance.

The political disputes bothers on the integration of the RSF into the military. One issue of contention is the RSF's insistence on a ten-year plan for its integration into the regular army, while the regular army demands it be done in two years. Other issues included the status given to RSF officers in the future hierarchy, and whether the RSF forces should be under the command of the army chief – rather than Sudan's commander-in-chief – who is currently Burhan. As a sign of their rift, Dagalo expressed regret over the October 2021 coup.

The RSF is a paramilitary organization with roots in Janjaweed militias that operated during the Darfur War. It was formally created by President Bashir in 2013 and was led by Dagalo and overseen directly by Bashir. They gained notoriety for their crackdown on pro-democracy protestors during the Khartoum massacre in June 2019. The Bashir regime allowed several armed groups, including the RSF, to proliferate to prevent threats to its security from within the armed forces, a practice known as “coup-proofing”. Both the RSF and the army have benefitted from security training and arms shipments from Russia in exchange for gold. The RSF and Dagalo's consolidation of power went hand in hand with a rapid accumulation of wealth, with the paramilitary chief seizing key gold mining locations in Darfur, intervention as part of the Saudi-led coalition forces during the Yemeni Civil War, and colluding with the Russian private military outfit Wagner Group (buttressing Russia's influence of in Africa). This led to the RSF forces growing rapidly into the tens of thousands, possessing thousands of armed pickup trucks, which regularly patrolled the streets of Khartoum.

However, Sudan has consistently denied the presence of Wagner on its territory.

These tensions between the RSF and the Sudanese Government or Military are clear signs of a major conflict in sight.

On the 11th April 2023, the RSF forces deployed near the city of Merowe and in Khartoum. Government forces ordered them to leave, but they refused, leading to clashes when the RSF forces took control of the Soba military base south of Khartoum. The Rapid Support Forces began their mobilization on the 13th April 2023, raising fears of a rebellion against the junta. The Sudanese Armed Forces said the mobilization was illegal.

The currently developing events in Sudan is similar to a typical power struggle seen in fragile states, where more than one powerful armed group exist and each is vying for control. However, the political conflict and escalating military confrontation is actually much more complex than a simplistic power struggle.

From the early 2000s until now, the RSF grew in number, to over 100,000 fighters, which is nearly the size of the SAF fighting force. However, unlike the SAF which is modestly trained on conventional battles and traditional warfare, the RSF rank and file is extremely well groomed in guerrilla tactics and have gained vast battle-hardened skills over the past two decades in Darfur, in addition to their practical involvement in Yemen fighting against the Houthis. This helps explain how the RSF was able to swiftly occupy critical positions across Sudan and the country's capital, Khartoum, over the past few days.

The funding of the RSF has been a controversial issue, especially foreign funding associated with political players. However, one clear fact concerning the RSF's sources of income is that the group controls the gold mining industry in Sudan and sells this gold to Russia and Middle East buyers, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which is the largest importer of Sudanese gold. Thus, the current political conflict is complicated by the distinct possibility of foreign support to various domestic proxies in the conflict.

Over centuries, Egypt has always considered Sudan crucial for its strategic security along its southern border. Many of Sudan's military and government heads have received their education and training in Egypt, including Sudan's current military commander and de facto ruler, general Abdul Fatah al-Burhan. Since 2019, the Egyptian administration has coordinated and strongly supported general al-Burhan in key strategic interests for both nations, including joint military exercises and war-games. Bilateral cooperation was further solidified amid growing tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia following the latter's construction of the Nahda dam, which poses a national security threat to Egypt stemming from possible negative agricultural and social impacts from upstream control over flow volume of the Nile River. This helps to explain the continuous presence of Egyptian air force members in bases in Sudan, including Egyptian MiG-29 fighter jets when the RSF captured the Merowe air base. In this respect, it is highly likely that Egypt will continue to support the SAF, headed by general Al-Burhan. This is especially true because the RSF head, Hemedti, maintains strong ties with Ethiopia's government and prime minister, which is clearly opposed to Egypt's strategic interests.

The UAE, which has been a longstanding and historical ally to Egypt for decades, has also maintained strong ties with both the SAF and RSF. This is obvious from the UAE's massive gold procurement from Sudan, where most of the mines are controlled by Hemedti. Although it is not clear which side the UAE will formally support in the current conflict, whatever the next move is, it will surely require very close coordination and agreement between the UAE and Egyptian administration where the strategic interests of both nations require common ground. Any disagreements in this regard risk negatively affecting the ongoing political conflict and military confrontation between the SAF and RSF.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an important player also in the possibility of resolving the conflict in Sudan. Over the past few years, tens of thousands of Sudan's soldiers were sent to Yemen to fight under the Saudi-led coalition. In this respect, Saudi Arabia has maintained strong and close ties with both commanders of Sudan's SAF and the RSF. Saudi Arabia has played a key role in mediating the peace discussions between civilian groups and the military in Sudan during the past period as a part of its attempts for reconciling both sides for the sake of Sudan's peace and political stability. Although it is not yet clear how the same approach might work for Saudi Arabia's ongoing peace moves in such heavily armed conflict in Sudan, coordination between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE is unavoidable, especially given that Egypt's strategic security interests and the UAE's strategic economic interests are both deeply rooted in Sudan's political and military ecosystem.

Israel's position in this regard is important to consider as well, along with the possible indirect support it can offer. In 2020, the Israel-Sudan normalization agreement took place where it was agreed that both countries will normalize relations, peace, diplomatic, and trade relations. Furthermore, the agreement was reached under the SAF commander and the country's de facto leader, General Al-Burhan. Considering the developing armed conflict between the RSF and the SAF, the actual implementation of the normalization agreement between Israel and Sudan raises a question mark, especially with the current events ending the hopes of forming a civilian government in Sudan. Despite that, the RSF's Hemedti indicated before that normalizing ties with Israel that it would be a gain for Sudan; however, history shows that armed groups that are not originally and officially born from the state military can easily change terms and agreements.

Russia can thus far be viewed as an observer with no formal support for any side in the ongoing conflict in Sudan. However, Russia has maintained arms supplies and close military relations with the Sudanese government for decades. Furthermore, Moscow recently agreed with the SAF and Sudan's de facto leader, general Al-Burhan, to establish a naval base in Sudan, allowing Russia to place troops and naval articles in

Sudan to serve Russia's regional interests across the Red Sea. In this respect, it is unclear how the implementation of this agreement, which is strategic for Russia, will be impacted, especially should it require "civilian" parliamentary approval in Sudan. The civilian parliament is yet to be formed, but given ongoing developments and the RSF's apparent objective to control the Sudanese state apparatus, it is highly unlikely that a civilian parliament will come into being anytime soon. While the delay of formation of a parliament is certainly devastating for Sudan, this delay can serve the US and Western nations' strategic interests by potentially delaying an official presence of a Russian naval force in the Sudan and the Red Sea.

Although Russia's interests are evidently more oriented toward the SAF and general al-Burhan, the presence and involvement of Wagner group in Sudan suggests otherwise. The Wagner group is a private Russian paramilitary group with longstanding ties with the Russian administration. The presence of the Wagner group in Sudan over the past few years has been strongly associated with protecting gold mines in Sudan, which are controlled by the RSF. Furthermore, the group is said to be involved in the trade of the gold between the RSF and Russia. More alarming is that recent reports show that Wagner group is arming the RSF against the SAF, the latter of which should "presumably" be supported by Russia. That said, the Russian position and involvement is a complex one given that Russia, via Wagner group, does have armed "boots on the ground" in Sudan. More interestingly, Russia's involvement in Sudan can possibly have a different angle from the Russian side in terms of taking advantage of the situation and opposing the U.S. and Western agenda in Sudan. However, Russia's involvement in Sudan, especially with the RSF, may not be in the best interests of Egypt, which provides longstanding direct and indirect support to Russia.

The Libyan crisis complicated the security situation in MENA and Sub Saharan Africa and this Sudanese ongoing crisis is another dangerous trend. The Darfur regional Governor (Minni Minawi), who was thought to have been killed, led the SLA (or SLM) into Darfur last month, which might further heighten the crisis. Some reports said this move is being backed by Chad and France.

In conclusion, the political turmoil between the RSF and the SAF in Sudan is much more complex than it appears. While it may appear to be a straightforward issue of power struggles, the underlying factors, as briefly indicated above, risk complicating the situation and rendering any peace initiatives useless. Given the RSF's history and operations, existing conflicts, and the international community's involvement, addressing and maintaining stability in Sudan will require very close policy coordination between Egypt, KSA, the UAE, Russia, the USA, and Israel.

V. CENTRAL ASIA - PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES



Current Threats in Central Asia and Beyond: Problems and Prospects

PhD Oybek N. MAKHMUDOV
(Uzbekistan)

Abstract

Non-traditional actors, who pursue their objectives of creating vulnerable security situations in regions, directly penetrate neighbouring regions. Central Asia has become the hotbed of most religious militant groups, mostly pursuing geopolitical objectives. These groups have combined various destructive methods to escalate conflicts. They play it as a hypothetical game to involve international militant groups, who help them effectively achieve their strategic goals. However, South and Central Asia's geo-cultural, geopolitical and geo-economic landmarks could create prerequisites for trans-regional stability.

Key words: South Asia, Central Asia, geopolitical, geostrategic, non-traditional threats, actors, conflicts, regional security.

In South and Central Asia and its neighbouring regions the challenges of facing non-traditional threats have become more complicated in the past years. At the beginning of 2000 there were just a few main militant groups. Recently their numbers have increased, and are freely operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan as well as over in Eurasia. These facts prove that there are foreign clandestine centres working for the promotion of the new militants groups that design and finance them, based on their geographical, ethnic and political determinations. The increasing number of research centres with military affiliations, working as analytical centres of the air force and other army affiliates, have explored insurgent movements, who have exported their "products" to testing grounds in other regions. Therefore, lately it has not been easy for both regions to struggle with scores of mobile militants groups. Meanwhile, some groups are openly functioning in South Asian countries, while they are banned in Central Asian countries and labelled as terrorist organizations.



Source: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2023/04/13/new-opening-for-eu-central-asia-relations-pub-89454>

Links with Other Threats

For over a decade now all eyes have been riveting on Afghanistan. The counter-terrorism approaches in South and Central Asia focus mostly on promoting limitation measures to prevent threats, because militants, operating in Afghanistan, have nexuses with European, Albanian, networks of drug organizations. These networks have increased their presence in the main production points and have begun to gain better control over the whole supply chain. Transnational organized crime organization defend their markets and production networks. The militants control opium and heroin trafficking, money laundering, small arms trading and convert their entire proceedings to hard currencies. For instance drug money provides opportunities for organized crime groups, and terrorist groups are an additional manpower capacity for militant activities in the regions.

The regional security organizations, functioning in here, are not so efficient in countering the penetration of militant groups and drug traffic, as those from Afghanistan and Pakistan or from the Golden Triangle, where opium crops spread on more than 157 thousand hectares¹. On one hand the “high tribunes” of international organizations have announced the adoption of restrictive measures to reduce drug trafficking, but in reality, foreign military troops have been freely carrying out huge businesses by delivering heroin through military air cargos that are rarely checked within military bases. It has also been proven that huge amounts of precursors and anidrids - the main ingredients for heroine production- are transported to Afghanistan through the Pakistani border. Recently trafficking heroin from Afghanistan became costly; hence the militants are transferring some of their laboratories to Central Asia. As a result Kyrgyzstan’s annual heroin output potential has suddenly zoomed to an estimated 180 to 220 tons. The Chu Valley, yields a very large crop of marijuana. That region is adjacent to the metropolitan centers of Bishkek and Almaty. According to reliable expert opinions, Kyrgyzstan’s recent drug exports to the outer world have outpaced those of Burma.²

There are other threats emanating from the two regions - the hidden laboratories that manufacture methaqualone/mandrax in addition to ATC³ trafficking from Myanmar, that ultimately spread to the CIS markets and beyond. Drug users spread AIDS, mainly from Vietnam. The drug dealers are directly linked to small arms trafficking, explosives and human trafficking. Drugs facilitate the quick flow of huge funds through *hawala* channels, and through illegal traders, who finance most of the militants’ activities. During the financial crisis in 2008, the drugs acted as “liquid goods” that enhanced the turnover of western banks. These banks subsequently required additional financial investments that helped them avoid bankruptcy. It is thus obvious that banks do have interests in laundering “drug money.” Therefore, the organized criminal nexus is too deep and too complex in South and Central Asia. Who reaps the benefits from increasing nontraditional threats and why is it essentially prone to these two regions?

Several factors can be cited. First of all, big actors are not genuinely interested in having a strong Central and South Asia. Strong and powerful nations in the regions are not in consonance with their geopolitical strategies, concepts and ambitions. Escalating military situations in the regions provide them insurance for arms exports. The major exporters of small arms delivered to Afghanistan are Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia and the US. (Small arms survey, Geneva, p128. 2004). Unfortunately, these weapons are recently being used by non-state actors, such as religious extremists and organized crime groups. Experts believe that more than 10 million small weapons are currently circulating in Afghanistan illegally⁴. And through the porous borders with Tajikistan, they could easily proliferate inside Central Asia. These small arms are available on the Afghani and Pakistani black markets, especially in the bazaars⁵ of Peshawar. Huge quantities of these weapons make military conflicts possible between ethnic groups in the region. Besides, the UK, France, Germany, Canada and Italy have approved huge arms supply plans to Saudi Arabia that may be used by all parties and political organizations in that country, which are illegal. Over the years, thousands of political or religious detainees have been jailed in Saudi Arabia.

The ongoing supply of small arms will lead to a regional arms race, so the arms can go to militant groups, radical fundamentalists and terrorists⁶. In the short term, the involvement of external actors in the region would only deteriorate the security situation. An accelerated arms race that may transform the region to become unstable. The presence of religious militant bases in Afghanistan would put constraints on the proposed energy projects for exporting Central Asian energy resources to the countries in the Indian Ocean and beyond. This would ultimately deprive the Central Asian countries, acutely dependent on exporting energy resources to developing countries, of the trade with developing countries. The regional security structures lack in capacity to adequately prevent the threats posed by well organized militant groups waging guerrilla warfare. Moreover the militants effectively use the rugged, mountainous terrain to cover their penetration into various cities of the regions. In Kyrgyzstan a radical booklet was found that described the economic situations in Bangladesh and Malaysia to draw attention and attract followers from among the illiterate population in rural areas.

The regional security organizations in the region have limited capacity, inadequate experience and no joint counter force strategies. Sometimes, forces rush to the field without a night fighting capacity, inferior air support, inadequate communication facilities, no bullet proof armour, no proper maps of the area, no essential rations, and with helmets incapable of withstanding fire from a Kalashnikov assault rifle⁷. However, the militants, armed with light weapons and night vision goggles, are well armed for prolonged armed struggle⁸. All these factors stem from the following problems.

Firstly, the CSTO member states do not have well-trained, mobile forces ready to counter local terrorist operations, in the mountains of Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The CSTO counter strategies are mostly directed at preventing macro level threats, emanating from conventional and regional armed conflicts, rather than facing or countering militant activities in local areas.

Secondly, over the last few years there has been increasing mistrust between Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regional security organizations such as NATO, the OSCE, the CSTO and the SCO in countering terrorism. Member countries do differ on collecting precise information, which would be aimed at prohibiting funding, finding, fixing, targeting and then effectively engaging the enemy. The process remains too slow and creates barriers in dealing with the extant reality.

Thirdly, there is limited or no interregional military cooperation to face the challenges of non-traditional threats. As a result, fleeing insurgents are not caught, they roam free and all operations are rendered fruitless. The absolute absence of a common approach to countering non-traditional security threats in the region is a major setback.

Fourthly, a number of regional security organizations carry functions duplicated by their counterparts in other countries. This creates more problems than expected and as states grow complacent and incapable, the militants grow strong and capable. Despite overlapping memberships in the three regional bodies, there is a lack of coordination among the members and duplication of efforts, including regarding their counterterrorism strategy.

The non-traditional actors, who pursue their objectives and creating vulnerable security situations in various regions, directly penetrate neighbouring countries. Besides, the Central and South Asia have become a hotbed for the most ferocious religious militant groups, mostly pursuing geopolitical objectives. Most militant groups receive their training and learn all testing tactics in training camps located outside the regions in Caucasus and Pakistan. There they combine various nefarious methods to escalate conflicts. They play it as a hypothetical game to involve international militant groups, who help them effectively achieve their strategic goals. Therefore, there is an urgency and the following counter measures should be taken into account:

Firstly, there is a need to activate prevention mechanisms that detect and deter destructive propaganda, coming from the militant groups. They have been using sophisticated communications systems for promoting their radical propaganda through the internet and other digital systems. Such activities ought to be considered cyber crimes and the guilty must be brought to book. Collective precaution should be taken to prevent religious propaganda aimed at manipulating the population and hitting it with false religious ideas. Efficient countermeasures in this direction would be of immense use to harness the religious and cultural potentials of the regions against destructive militant ideologies in Central and South Asia. What the countries of Central and South Asia need to do is to launch a global educational and informational campaign against militant terrorists and religious extremists in order to educate the population about their heinous designs. Central and South Asia are located at a crossroads, between cultures, religions and civilizations with crucial geopolitical significance. Samarkand and Bukhara played a significant role in the Islamic world as civilizations with 2500 years of history. So were the Seljuk in the Turks. The seminal contributions of the Timurid and Baburid rulers were no less significant.

After the withdrawal of the allied forces from Afghanistan in 2014, theatres of threats would emerge across Central and South Asia. A fluid political situation may be used by western countries to obtain fragmented relations between Central Asian countries and their neighbors, by pushing through various geopolitical projects. Implementation of effective counter terrorism strategies in these regions requires a well thought out roadmap, collectively approved and collectively pursued so that their endeavor would ultimately bear fruit. A solid regional security system in both the regions through the SCO framework may contribute in this regard. Local experts believe that it is necessary to create an “anti drug belt” around Afghanistan in which joint counter operations with the EU, the UN, Afghanistan’s neighbors and Central Asian countries would play a prominent role in checkmating the financial flow to militant activities. However, a CSTO ruled by Russia does not overtly approve the active role of the SCO. Therefore, with a view to effectively countering the menace of contemporary militants, a universal approach should be worked out, to combine all possible measures: military, political, academic, educational, religious, and cultural.

In midterm perspectives, virtual warfare could remain an informational war waged by militants groups and non-state actors against state structures, to affect and destroy the cyber warfare potential possessed by the them. Making it dysfunctional is the leitmotif of militant groups, which would invariably target computer systems in the business, social, governing, and defense sectors. The main targets of the cyber tools are directed at increasing the number of adherents through websites. Counter measures against cyber warfare by the militant groups are undeveloped in the regions. Therefore cyber war creates another critical shift in the nature of new militant threats in the regions. The idea of “one man army“ is real. A well trained hacker can do more damage than anyone can ever imagine or hoped to achieve with other kinds of technology. The safest and surest way of communication for the extremists is through the Internet and through the use of various “chat houses”. Since no one knows who is at either end of the “electronic conversation”, no one knows the significance of what is being communicated. The militant groups have become so sophisticated in encrypting their messages that even the spoken words do not communicate the real meaning of the conversation. Hence propaganda is spread.

Non-state actors either enjoy overt support of the state or operate covertly in connivance with state agencies. They linked the entire nexus in Central Asia to the “Golden Crescent” (comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) and the “Golden Triangle” (comprising Myanmar, Laos and Thailand). These are the two major routes for drug trafficking. Many terrorist organizations have links to nongovernmental international organizations. For instance the militant organizations have regularly received financial support from liberal offshore banks, foreign law enforcement agencies, companies, wealthy individuals and NGOs, such as Aid and Relief Organizations. However, money from drug trafficking is the base of their financial support. Estimates suggest that drug trafficking from Afghanistan has already reached an export value of around USD 1.8- 2.7 billion of which a quarter only goes to the opium farmers and the rest is appropriated by local officials, militants, field commanders and drug dealers.

After 2014 most external actors in the region would focus more on Central and South Asia. Therefore there is an urgent need to jointly look at the issues related to regional stability. The countries in Central and South Asia are important to the western powers as strategic partners in the region to be pitted against other regional powers such as Russia, China, and Iran. Such a power configuration in the region is in the interest of the West and would protect the commercial concerns regarding the exploitation of Caspian energy resources.

All of these factors primarily focus on economic interests. Russia’s increased military and strategic presence in the region entails vulnerabilities to Central Asia’s security systems and economic development. Russia is keenly interested in restoring its influences in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Russia’s traditional fields of action would be direct: energy policy, military-technical cooperation, and plans to change the balance of forces in the region. Projects for transporting gas from Turkmenistan and the broader Caspian Basin across Afghanistan to South Asia, which were precluded by the instability in Afghanistan, could be revived in the long run, in the context of a broader effort to restore and improve road, rail and other transport and communication routes. The revival of Central Asia’s future connections with India, which have been cut due to the war in Afghanistan, opens up the possibility of access to Indian ports as well as markets for Russian and Central Asian goods.

Given Russia’s ongoing interest in the North-South freight transportation corridor, Russia can play a particularly important role in developing the infrastructure and bringing the landlocked Central Asian countries into the global marketplace, by embracing them into that corridor. Here, the United States could also play a role, by encouraging and assisting Russia in the development of this route as a complement to the East-West transportation routes from Central Asia across the Caspian, to the Caucasus and the Black Sea. While the East-West route became the focus of the early competition between USA and Russia, the development of a North-South route, binding Central Asia to Europe and Asia could easily become a platform for cooperation. Without cooperation between the big external powers, the prospects for stability in Central Asia are fairly slim. In addition, replaying the “Great Game” would only undermine the US and Russian efforts to safeguard their national interests in the region.

Conclusion

The main problems for the stability of South and Central Asia emanate from the geopolitical concepts and initiatives of the external powers. Concepts such as “Wider Black Sea West Strategies”, “Wider Central Asia”, “New Silk Routes” and others initiatives have one objective: to ensure complete control over strategic regions by creating “of influence rings”. The ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, the insurgency, and religious conflicts, spreading across the Middle East should serve as a reminder to foreign powers to change their geopolitical views in favor of setting up a global organization to quickly implement common counter measures to dispel the threats of terrorists and militant groups. Thus the only way to mitigate common threats from the

militant groups is by overcoming differences and setting up a collective mechanism for combating various non-traditional threats. Central and South Asia's geo-cultural, geopolitical and geo-economic landmarks could create prerequisites for trans-regional stability.

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VI. GLOBAL ORDER AND SECURITY - FIGHTING CORRUPTION



Combating Aid Corruption Efficiently Maximizing the Impact of Foreign Financial Aid

*Oluwasogo Joseph DAIRO
(Nigeria)*

Introduction

Foreign financial aid plays a crucial role in supporting needy countries, addressing socio-economic challenges, and fostering sustainable development. However, concerns about corruption and the mismanagement of aid funds have often overshadowed the positive impacts of these initiatives. To ensure that foreign financial aid achieves its intended goals and effectively supports recipient nations, it is essential to implement robust strategies that combat corruption. By adopting transparent practices, promoting accountability, and empowering local communities, we can maximize the effectiveness of foreign financial aid and create positive change.

Strengthen Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms

Transparency is a cornerstone of combating corruption in foreign financial aid. Both donors and recipient countries should establish clear guidelines and mechanisms for the allocation, disbursement, and monitoring of aid funds. Transparency enables the public, civil society organizations, and independent auditors to monitor the flow of funds and hold all stakeholders accountable.

a. **Publish Aid Information:** Donors should disclose detailed information about aid packages, including the amount, purpose, and conditions attached. Recipient countries should also provide regular reports on aid uses and outcomes, ensuring transparency and facilitating public oversight.

b. **Open Bidding Processes:** Encouraging open and competitive bidding processes for aid projects helps prevent favoritism and promotes efficiency. Publicly announcing tenders, evaluating bids based on merit, and involving independent observers can enhance transparency and reduce corruption risks.



c. **Strengthen Audit Systems:** Establishing or reinforcing independent audit bodies in recipient countries can help ensure proper financial management. These entities should have sufficient authority, resources, and access to information to conduct thorough examinations of aid utilization, identify irregularities, and hold responsible parties accountable.

Foster Local Ownership and Capacity Building

Foreign financial aid programs should prioritize local ownership and capacity building initiatives. Empowering recipient countries to take charge of their development agenda enhances their ability to allocate resources efficiently, minimizes dependence on external assistance, and reduces the potential for corruption.

a. **Participatory Approach:** Engage local communities, civil society organizations, and relevant stakeholders in aid planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. This participatory approach helps align projects with local needs, enhances accountability, and strengthens ownership, reducing the chances of corruption.

b. **Strengthen Institutional Capacities:** Invest in building the institutional capacities of recipient countries, including governance structures, public financial management systems, and anti-corruption agencies. Developing robust institutions and training skilled personnel will help prevent corruption and ensure effective aid utilization.

c. **Promote Knowledge Exchange:** Encourage knowledge sharing and cooperation between donor and recipient countries. Facilitating the transfer of expertise, best practices, and lessons learned can improve the effectiveness of aid programs and build local capacity for sustainable development.

Foster Collaboration and Coordination

To combat corruption effectively, stakeholders involved in foreign financial aid should collaborate and coordinate their efforts. Mutual accountability, information sharing, and coordination among donors, recipient countries, and international organizations are vital to address corruption risks collectively.

a. **Harmonize Donor Efforts:** Donors should align their aid strategies, avoid duplication, and pool resources when possible. Harmonizing efforts minimizes inefficiencies, reduces administrative burdens on recipient countries, and strengthens oversight mechanisms.

b. **Support Civil Society Organizations:** Civil society organizations play a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability. Donors should provide support to local NGOs, watchdog groups, and independent media organizations working to combat corruption and advocate for the effective utilization of aid funds.

c. **International Cooperation:** Promote international cooperation, including sharing intelligence, experiences, and best practices in combating corruption. Collaboration between donor countries, international financial institutions, and anti-corruption agencies can help develop global standards and frameworks that reduce corruption risks.

The possibility of Foreign donations to be managed by a foreign bodies or affiliates (which proper foreign supervisor and audit) should be considered.

Throwing money at problems is failing, especially in Africa.

One Should Rather:

- a. Find out what the challenges are.
- b. Look for a solution as much as possible.
- c. Plan it and get donation.
- d. Get a presence where it's needed, direct or indirect presence.
- e. Get what is needed from the sending country or host country or wherever.
- f. Execute the planned solution by your presence on ground.

This is AID in a different way.

Conclusion

While corruption challenges persist in the foreign financial aid system, implementing robust strategies can mitigate these risks and ensure that the Foreign Aid system is rather more effective in achieving its goals.

Authors' Biographies



Prof. Phd. Constantin HLIHOR

Expert on the history of the 20th century, geopolitics and the history of international relations. Doctor Honoris Causa of "Ovidius" University in Constanta.

He has a PhD in history - 1994, (thesis: Bessarabia and Northern Bucovina During the Second World War).

He is the author of numerous books, articles and studies, including "Romania and the Geopolitical Shocks of the Cold War" (2016) and "Revolution and Transition in Romania in a Short Century. 1918-1989 (2017).

He has extensive experience as a professor and a phd supervisor in various institutions. He took part in research projects, such as: Implications of Romania's integration in the EU - national defence strategy, Funding program: PNCDI II / Partnerships, contract no. 32 GR of 0505 2006; An Evaluation of Romania's Geostrategic Position in the Wider Black Sea Region, CNCSIS, contract no. 14GR of 14 05 2007.



PhD. Cosmin DUMITRESCU

He is the Consul General of Romania in Los Angeles (USA). A career diplomat, with a degree in law, in foreign languages and a PhD in management, he previously headed the Consular Section of the Romanian Embassy in Rome, the National Centre for Diplomatic and Service Passports within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Romanian Consulate in Castellon de la Plana - Spain and the Consulate General of Romania in Trieste - Italy. He worked as a teacher at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute, at the Consular Training and

Training Centre of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and represented Romania in expert committees of the European Council and the European Commission in Brussels. He has published papers on consular regulation, emergency and disaster management, and security studies. Specialist and connoisseur of English, Italian, Spanish and French.



Lect. PhD habil. Miruna BUTNARU TRONCOTĂ

Researcher in political science, international relations, with experience in international research projects and teaching in English. Her special expertise made her contribute to special assignments in the NSPAS academic environment: Associate professor / Postdoctoral Researcher, University Lecturer, Director of the NSPAS European Studies Center, qualified to coordinate phds in political sciences.

She was an Internal Political Officer with the European External Action Service, Delegation of the European Union in Pristina (Kosovo) European Union Special Representative (EUSR). She has a Bachelor's degree in Political Sciences, a Master's degree in Political Theory and Analysis, and a phd in Political Sciences.



Prof. PhD. Nicolae RADU



He held important positions in the national security system such as: head of the Psychological Expertise Centre within the PSS, Authorized Director of the Psycho-sociology Centre of the Ministry of Interior, advisor to the state secretary in Ministry of Interior; advisor in the Supreme Defense Council of the Country, Presidential Administration; spokesperson of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Police Academy. Nicolae Radu is a professor at “Spiru Haret” University in Bucharest. Since 2018, as an associate professor, he has taught courses in Leadership, Specialized Laboratory - Information Services, Military Psychopathology at the University in Bucharest. Since 2015, Nicolae Radu has been a qualified PhD supervisor for Information and National Security at the “Carol I” National Defence University.

At present he is interested in intelligence, prevention and combating terrorism, but also in the area of applied psychology for personnel destined for special missions such as Sayeret Matkal within the Israel Elite Special Forces Unit and General Staff Reconnaissance Unit 269.



Prof. PhD. Cristian BARNA



Training Manager at Intelligene4ALL, guest professor at Babeş Bolyai University in Cluj Napoca and University of Bucharest and former vice-rector and PhD coordinator of the National Information Academy in Bucharest. Cristian Barna holds a PhD in sociology and his areas of expertise are applied sociology, intelligence and security studies, geopolitics, security organizations, organized crime and terrorism studies. Cristian Barna is the author of several books.



Oluwasogo Joseph DAIRO

(Nigeria)



He is a professional in the field of informational analysis from the media, and is an expert in documenting and managing information.

He is an affiliate member of the World Safety Organization, USA.

He is passionate with international relations combining his acquired experience in the safety and security fields with his passion.



PhD. Mohammad Al MOKDAD

(Lebanon)

PhD in Geopolitics (2021 - Present) PSG IKI - France, PhD in International Relations and Diplomacy CEDS - France, (2021 - Present), Master in Social Policies (2019 - 2021), Lebanese University Strategic and Diplomatic Studies, (2017 - 2019), Military Studies, at the Military College. He knows Arabic, English, French and Italian. He is a graduate of numerous military, diplomacy, public order and security courses in Lebanon and abroad.



Andreea-Cristina STANCA

She has a degree in international relations and European studies at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest with diploma thesis "The Specificity of the Israeli Army: Particularities and Influence on Politics. She attended a Master's Program in Diplomacy and Negotiations at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies. She took part in the YOUTHPASS The Youth Creative Academy project, in Cabris, France, which aimed to identify and apply creative methods of learning and expression that contribute to the development of young people's skills in the times when digitization and globalization are becoming more and more present. She participated in the Summer School and modular courses at the Centre for Israeli Studies "Theodor Herzl".



Eva J. KOULOURIOTIS

(Greece)

She is a Greek political analyst specializing in the Middle East. She is also a writer and commentator at various international institutions.

www.evakoulourioti.com.



PhD Oybek N. MAKHMUDOV

(Uzbekistan)



He graduated from the Faculty of Applied Political Science at the National University of Uzbekistan. He has postgraduate studies in European Studies, at the University of Exeter/ Great Britain. Has a bachelor's degree in Political Sciences at the National University of Uzbekistan/ Faculty of Social and Political Sciences and a postgraduate degree in economics and sociology of work at Moscow State Social University, Russia.

He has a phd in the Theory and History of Political Sciences, his thesis: "The Problems and Perspectives of Central Asia as Objects of Political Science Studies".

He speaks English, is fluent in Russian and Uzbek.

He has experience with the development of international research projects, the facilitation of strategic concepts, and has a vast work experience:

- 2022- Editor - Ethnopolitical Studies, Turkey,*
- 2020 -Researcher - Academic Associations Peace Conflict Studies, Canada,*
- 2016 - Present, Associate Editor of Forum of EthnoGeoPolitics (Netherlands),*
- 01. 2018 - Present Head of Consulting - Baker Tilly Uzbekistan (Business Consulting),*
- 03.2015 - 12.2017 - Advisor for strategic development - Baker Tilly, Uzbekistan.*



PhD. Eng. Stelian TEODORESCU



He is an aviation engineer and during his doctoral studies he was admitted to the Smart-SPODAS Project - "Transnational network for the integrated management of smart doctoral and postdoctoral research in the fields of Military Sciences", "Security and Information" and "Public Order and National Security" - Continuous training program for elite researchers - "SmartSPODAS", in this context participating in various research activities, among them being those organized by CRISMART in Sweden. During the first part of his career, he performed various executive within the Air Force Staff, and in the second part of his career, he was an executive and leadership positions within the

Ministry of National Defence. He participated in various cooperation activities at the national and international level, gaining professional experience in the field of international relations and geopolitics. He carried out teaching activities in the academic environment (undergraduate and postgraduate studies).

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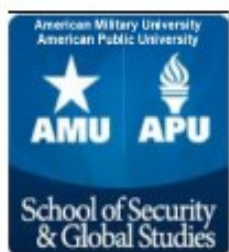
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